



2010

**Nambour Good Beginnings Family
Support Program Evaluation**



Maria Tennant

Community Development, Housing & Planning Consultant

PO Box 1119, Noosaville DC Qld 4566

p: 07 5474 8161

m: 0448877329

e: tennferr@bigpond.net.au

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Introduction and Overview of Evaluation Project

In the second half of 2010 the staff and management committee of Nambour Community Centre decided to initiate an external evaluation of its family support program - Nambour Good Beginnings. The objective of the evaluation was to provide the staff and the management committee to better understand the benefits and weakness of the “model” that the program is based around. The outcomes of the evaluation would be used to inform future planning around the Nambour Good Beginnings program.

Staff decided that the most appropriate and useful method to use for the evaluation was the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology developed by Davies and Dart (2005). MSC focuses on intermediate outcomes and impacts as perceived by participants who are requested to tell and share their own stories of ‘significant change’. The rationale for the method is that “the answers to the central question about change are often in the form of stories of who did what, when, and why – and the reasons why the event was important” (Dart 1999a, 1999b).

This methodology was used in the 2009 evaluation of Nambour Good Beginnings Community Early Parenting Project in Kenilworth and proved to be a valuable tool that assisted in setting the projects future direction and more generally promoting a culture of continuous review based of the expressed views of participants. The 2009 evaluation was undertaken by Maria Tennant, a community development, housing & planning consultant. Because this evaluation worked really well it was decided to ask Maria to again manage this work for the larger Nambour Good Beginnings (NGB) evaluation.

Geographically this evaluation does not include the Nambour Good Beginnings activities that occur within the Kenilworth community as they have been separately evaluated in 2009 (the report is available on NCC website, www.nambourcc.org/Resources.html).

The Participants

For the purposes of this evaluation the term “participants” includes clients, volunteers, staff and stakeholders of the Nambour Good Beginnings program. In total there were 27 participants in the evaluation, most were parents. The breakdown of the participants was as follows:

- Parents accessing the program (14)
- Volunteers in the program (5) including home visiting and Playgroup
- All Nambour Good Beginnings staff and NCC Coordinator (4)
- Stakeholders (NGB Advisory Group members) (4) including: child care centres (2), Multiple Births Association and Child Health.

The Evaluation Process

The evaluation project had several phases which included:

1. Establishment of the project plan and engagement process with staff
2. Engagement with participant parents through attendance at Playgroup and by letter of invitation to all current Nambour Good Beginnings parents and volunteers

3. Interviews to gather stories from parents and volunteers
4. Story prioritisation sessions held with participants at a Friday Night BBQ and a follow up Playgroup session
5. Collection of stories from staff about the service and their practice
6. Survey of NGB stakeholders for their feedback and stories of change
7. Analysis of 'change' stories within the 'domains of significance'
8. Staff workshop to review evaluation findings and reflect on the model of Nambour Good Beginnings, program issues, resourcing needs and areas for potential development for the future.
9. Completion of the evaluation report and the compilation of the stories into a booklet for participants who wish to have a copy.

The evaluation stories that were gathered from participants were themed according to how they related to several 'domains of significant change'. These domains were pre-set according to the current Nambour Good Beginnings program objectives. The domains of change that were explored were:

- i. Changes in children's well being
- ii. Changes in knowledge about parenting
- iii. Changes in confidence in parenting
- iv. Changes in family functioning
- v. Changes in social connections and support
- vi. Changes in knowledge about or access to services available to parents

The 'Significant Changes' section of this report (see page 37) discusses in more detail this part of the evaluation process.



The Findings – significant changes for parents, children and families

The stories gathered from participants in Nambour Good Beginnings indicate that as a result of their involvement in the program some significant changes have occurred. The positive changes that are reported at length in this report, and most especially in the stories told by the parents, provide extensive evidence that program objectives are being met. Additionally these stories give good insight into the facets of the model that make it so successful.

The overall findings confirmed that the program has been meeting objectives by:

- Increasing socialisation opportunities and social connections for parents and children, especially through Playgroup and parenting courses.
- Greatly increasing participants knowledge and skills of parenting, based on an increase in self awareness and communication skills
- Greatly improving participants relationships with their children
- Improving child wellbeing through increased parental capacity, family support and access to services.

Limitations of the Method

Whilst the evaluation project has produced valuable feedback for the program and a resource for participants of Nambour Good Beginnings, the modest budget for the evaluation project has limited the extent of engagement in the evaluation process.

Participation was also limited to those who 'agreed to be included' in the questionnaire/ story gathering process following a broad invitation to all participating parents, volunteers and key stakeholders (NGB Advisory Group members). It is interesting to note that there were more offers to participate (by both parents and volunteers) than project resources allowed.

An inherent challenge in conducting this type of enquiry was the interruptions to interviews with parents by children. The evaluators had to conduct the interviews where it was most practical or possible for participants; including at Playgroup, in the Nambour Community Centre offices or in family homes. Parents were more often than not also supervising their children. However, some parents and other participants took the opportunity to further develop their stories following the transcripts from interviews or following the BBQ or Playgroup 'prioritisation' sessions. As a result of this there is a level of 'unevenness' between the depth and length of individual parent's stories.



About Nambour Good Beginnings

Background and history

Unlike many neighbourhood or community centres, Nambour Community Centre did not originally have a family support component within its state government funding arrangement. So in 1999 and 2000 the coordinator Leonie Hemsall began evidencing and lobbying the case for a family support program to operate within the community centre. The local State Government contact officers indicated that they were interested in resourcing such a program, particularly if the federal government would also provide resourcing. At the time it was suggested that the state would match the amount of federal funding provided.

At this same time Good Beginnings Australia (GBA) was becoming established at a national level and the model that they were proposing was somewhat similar to the ideas that NCC was considering. The GBA model had a focus on prevention and early intervention which meant that it was closer to the overall strategy of NCC than alternative models. GBA was also interested in forming partnerships with existing organisations, particularly in States outside southern Australia where it had its own direct service outlets.

When Leonie finished up in the coordinator role in August 2000 she handed over to Leone Smith who continued the process and was successful in obtaining funding from what is now the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA). This was initially matched with a commitment from the State Government - Department of Families. In 2001 when Tina Lathouras had moved into the role of Coordinator Nambour Good Beginnings was launched.

After a successful round of federal funding, FAHCSIA increased its contribution to the program and that led to the current arrangement of 60 percent Federal Government funding and 40 percent State Government funding.

In 2005 NGB received an additional small amount of funding (provided by a separate unit of FACSHIA) that was used for group work with families in Kenilworth. This funding ceased in 2009 but NGB continues to work in this area as participants expressed a strong desire for it to continue. The 2009 evaluation of Nambour Good Beginnings Community Early Parenting Project in Kenilworth helped establish this aspiration.

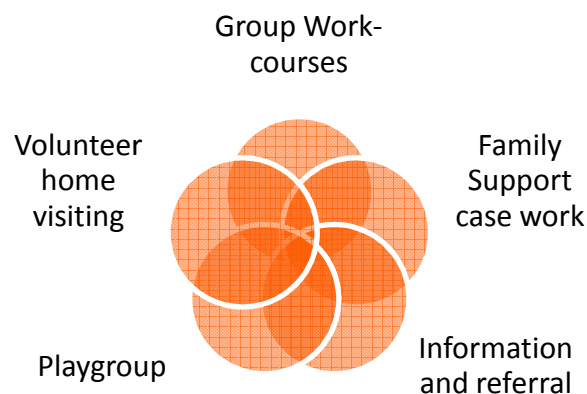
Currently NGB employs a Senior Family Support worker for 32 hours, a Family Support Worker for 30 hours and an Administration Assistant for 10 hours. High level program coordination is provided through the Coordinator role at NCC.

The model of service delivery

Nambour Good Beginnings offers a range of specific services as part its family support program. This range of services has been a characteristic of the Nambour Good Beginnings program since its inception. The services offered in the model include the following:

- a. **Volunteer Family Support** is an early intervention service offered to parents with babies or young children aged less than eight years to help reduce the isolation and stresses associated with parenting. Trained volunteers visit parents in their home providing support, information and friendship throughout Nambour and the surrounding areas.
- b. **Individual Family Support** offers additional support to families that require a higher level of support due to more complex needs e.g.: mental illness, domestic violence (DV), people with a disabilities, relationship and financial stress. This is a one on one service that usually involves a worker visiting parent / families in their homes.
- c. **Supported Playgroup** and **Parent Group** are conducted in the Nambour (facilitated playgroup) and Kenilworth (semi facilitated parent group). Activities are chosen and planned by the participants to facilitate, develop and support the value of play with children through parental involvement.
- d. **Parenting courses and group work** are facilitated to enhance healthy family relationships. This work occurs on an occasional basis with courses focussing on topics such as effective communication, parenting skills, social skills, child development, child protection and self care.
- e. **Information and Referral**, both general and parent specific is the fifth service type that is provided. This service is provided to existing NGB clients and stakeholders as a component of the previously mentioned services as well as in a “stand alone” capacity for individuals and organisations that make one off enquiries.

The figure below provides a representation of this model.



Under the current practice approach participation in any NGB services is voluntary and parents make the decision to opt in or out as they choose. Similarly parents are requested to be fully responsible to address their own issues and opportunities. The model is centred around a variety of support services that at their core have the principle that an inclusive respectful approach is the axis from which to build trust and personal capacity, confidence and communication skills. It is based on the guiding principle that an improved sense of personal agency, social connection and involvement reduces isolation leading to greater self sufficiency, better decision making, sustainable social support and lifelong skills.

The model of service delivery has evolved over time and changed due to the influence of the staff, volunteers and parents over the past nine years. In its first few years Nambour Good Beginnings operated with a model that more closely reflected the approach outlined by Good Beginnings Australia. It was very 'child centred' and highly structured. There was at that time a full time Coordination/Administrator role. At present, the Nambour Good Beginnings Coordinator is also the senior Family Support Worker and the NCC Coordinator has taken responsibility for managing external reporting. The model remains very similar but more emphasis has been placed on supporting children 'via the parents' and also on promoting healthy family relationships, individual wellness and practical improvements to family situations.

Also in recent years, the Nambour Good Beginnings staff also report changes on the balance of activities as well as service improvements such as greater documentation of case notes. The Coordinator described the program as being more fluid, allowing parents to influence how they engage and enabling staff taking a more holistic approach. There is also more emphasis on group work that involves both parents and volunteers and sometimes students. The group work is multi faceted. It aims to develop participants' communication and parenting skills as well as learning to function in a group/peer environment while developing a community of parents - all trying to do their best with the resources at hand in the situations they find themselves.

Period of time clients are in the program:

Clients are assessed by the Senior Family Support Worker in an initial interview to determine the issues and aspirations that they want to address and develop a support plan around. Every three months there is a further assessment by the Family Support Worker and Parent to determine the progress. Some clients have multiple complex issues which require a new support plan to be developed as they work through issues over time. This means that clients have stayed involved with one or more program services for periods of time from three months up to seven years.

Some clients who have addressed the identified issues that required intensive family support continue to request support via a Volunteer Community Parent and/or continue to come to the supported Playgroup.

How many families use the program

During the 6 monthly period from January 2010 to June 2010 Nambour Good Beginnings had 244 adults who accessed services. In total there were 240 children attached to these parents, 158 children were aged under five, 67 between five and 12 years and 15 between 13-18 years.

Over this same time period there were 19 families that were supported by 21 Volunteer Community Parents (two sets of these VC parents are couples). In total this equated to 1,431 hours of Volunteer Community Parent support being provided. 77 families received had intensive family support which included home and office visits or informal counselling via the telephone. During this reporting period there were 20 Playgroup sessions held weekly with 11 adults and 18 children under the age of five attending.

In addition, the Kenilworth project provided nine parent groups in the park with 40 adults (males, female and grandparents) and 61 children attending. There were also three social BBQ's that had a total of 34 adults attending and 44 children. Nambour Good Beginnings facilitated three parenting courses during the first six months of 2010. Parents from supported Playgroup, parents from intensive family support and parents within the broader Nambour community (but not part of our Nambour Good Beginnings program) were included in the training. A total of 32 adults attended these courses.

The current referrals profile of Nambour Good Beginnings

In the six month period from January to June 2010 there were 165 referrals in and out of Nambour Good Beginnings.

Most of the incoming referrals came from several main sources, 42 from Nambour Child Health, 19 from Nambour General Hospital and 15 from Child Youth Mental Health Services. 26 referrals were made between the family support services at Caloundra Community Centre and Maroochydore Neighbourhood Centre and the Young Parents Support group was involved in ten referrals and another nine were made to The Smith Family.

Other referral sources to NGB include Population Health, Department of Child Safety, Local Schools, SCOPE, Centrelink, University of Sunshine Coast and Sunshine Coast TAFE, Multiple Birth Association, QUIHN, Probation/Parole Brisbane, Noosa Rotary Club, Centacare, Nambour Cultural Connections program, SCILS, Childcare providers, Lions Emergency Accommodation Centre, Community Connect, FPQ, Nambour Community Centre – other programs, Department of Communities – Housing and Homelessness Services.



Participants' Stories

1. Parents

Nancy's story

Getting involved

I had suffered post-natal depression with my first child. We moved from down south to the Sunshine Coast. When I had my second child the hospital mentioned Good Beginnings. I put it to the back of my mind... but remembered some time later when I was really in a dark place. I contacted GB and had an interview with Kathryn and started at Playgroup. I also did a post natal depression course through maternal and Child Health... that was really good. I met other Mums there that really supported me through my journey. I now live in Central Qld.

Most Significant Changes

Title - Playgroup - I felt really welcomed and I also felt like I could contribute by being welcoming to other Mums.

When I started playgroup I felt really welcomed. I felt like I really fitted in. I also felt like I could contribute by being welcoming and friendly to other Mums. I was known as the tea lady... I always made cups of tea for everyone. It was my way of contributing. It was through seeing what some of the other Mums at Playgroup had to deal with that I realised the good things I had going for me in my life. That was good for me.

I found friends and support and realised and appreciated what I had going for myself in my family. Also (I found) an opportunity to contribute to others... share and support. Many of the friendship have endured over time and distance.

Title - Parenting Course: I learned that if a child is 'carrying on' it is for a reason.

I did the positive parenting course and that really changed how I perceived my children. It really hit home to me that children are little people, and that I was raising 'little adults' and that it was important not to belittle them. I had grown up being belittled by my parents. Having post-natal depression, I had enough to deal with in myself without the pressures of children and demands of parenting. Whilst I wasn't at the stage of belittling the children myself, I could feel the beginnings of the attitude and tone of belittlement in my voice. I wanted to stop it!

The parenting course was wonderful! I learned that if a child is carrying on it is for a reason. There's no use in turning to them and yelling 'stop it ... stop carrying on'. I learned that it worked wonders, when these situations arise or if they are feeling frustrated, if I said you're really upset ... would you like some help or letting them know what you think they might be feeling and leaving the door open for them to respond to your offer of help. I'll be thankful to Kathryn forever for teaching me that. It has made such a difference to my family. I wish there was Good Beginnings everywhere. There are so many people who could benefit from it.

I learned to be the parent I wanted to be by developing the knowledge and the skills I needed.

Title - Personal Development Courses - The courses really empowered me to be myself. I'm just so comfortable in my own skin now.

I realised through the self development courses, Me, Myself, I and AAA that if I didn't have anything 'left in my tank' I wasn't any use to anyone. I learned not to run my tank on empty. I've learned that if you don't take care of yourself first, you have nothing to give to others.

The courses really empowered me to be myself. My father was a Vietnam Veteran and there was no room in our family for emotions and expressing one's feelings.. I was quite an angry child and I can see now that I just could not get the attention I needed. I used to get smacked with a belt every day and sent to my room... still crying with a parent yelling at me to ... "stop or I'll give you another belting". I never learned how to express myself properly. The courses helped me to learn how to speak my mind and express my feelings without feeling scared or fearful of ridicule. I learned to look for the real problem underlying my discomfort, to use I messages and express myself. I can now stand up to my father (gently) and be myself. I am no longer looking for his or anyone else's approval.

The courses were empowering – profoundly changed my approach to myself, my children and my relationships.

Title -Friendship and support ... through the good and dark times

The volunteer at Playgroup, Sharone, is so beautiful. We bonded through Playgroup and she became part of my support network. She has a special bond with my son. I still see her when we come to Nambour. She's someone who's really touched my life. The workers I connected with at GB – Kathryn, Belinda and Sharone have all touched my life... I will never forget them.

When my middle son was 18months we discovered that he needed to have a skull reconstruction. So when he was 2 years and 4 months old he had to undergo major surgery. I felt like the world was crumbling ... and there were also business issues and family of origin issues going on at the same time. Everyone at Good Beginnings was there for me... the Mums, the workers the volunteers. It gave me support when I really needed it.

Title – the child care during arrangement during the courses was an excellent

It great to have the children looked after next door by someone they know when you are doing the course. You can hear them and it takes the stress out of having to leave them at home or with someone else.

I had become very protective of my children following the post natal depression and was really happy that I could 'duck out to them', should they need me.

Parent's story (name withheld by request)

Getting involved

I was referred to Nambour Good Beginnings through Community Health at Nambour. My daughter was six months old (she is now six years old) and I was not coping and suffering from Post Natal

Depression. The nurse said this group was for mothers in the same position as me. I spoke to Belinda and I attended Playgroup on a Tuesday.

Most Significant Changes

Title - Playgroup provided a social outlet for me and my daughter

Playgroup provided a social outlet for me and my daughter. I have no family base on the Sunshine Coast. I also didn't go out much and had no friends. Playgroup allowed me to talk to other Mothers and to get some advice and help over a cup of coffee. When talking to them I would find out they were experiencing similar issues. With no family my daughter had no cousins so it was important for her to have children to play with. It is a great thing and it really, really helped me. I am still friends with two people I met through Playgroup. I left playgroup because my daughter was getting old and went to a musical playgroup for a short time.

Title: The course has helped me to see what I was putting up with at home

I completed a course on self esteem and I felt it helped me to see what I was putting up with at home. The course made me more assertive. My husband did not like this and told me 'you have changed'. I did attend a Parenting course in which they talked about 'what to do' and 'how to do it'. I listened but didn't implement the skills. I would like to refresh my skills but access to the course is difficult because I don't have a car.

Title: It is great to have someone to talk too and get advice from

I broke up with my husband when my daughter was two years old. After this I had problems with him feeding and needed someone to talk to and get advice from. Anna came into my home and was very helpful. I could talk to her one on one and I didn't have to go out. Anna also provided information to me about a domestic violence counsellor at SCOPE.

Title : A short break and some time on my own would have been good

I was meant to have a volunteer come to my home but it didn't happen. I met the lady and she was going to come over one night so I could have a break but she wanted to bring her teenage daughter. I 'wasn't keen to have a stranger in the house and did not know how my daughter would react. I would have liked a volunteer because I never have a break; I am on my own and would have loved to have a three or four break.

Carla's Story

Getting involved

My next door neighbor, at the time, invited me to come along to playgroup and the Community Centre, when she saw that I was struggling with my baby, Bailey.

Most Significant Changes

Title: I needed to get out of the house and be with other parents

I had a traumatic birth with Bailey but was quickly sent home from hospital with no support or follow up. I had troubles feeding as well. I later discovered when Bailey was about 5 years old that

he was autistic. In the early days it was a constant struggle because he was different from other children. Although I had a few friends with children, I didn't know anyone else with a baby like mine... and either did my mother or other family members. I felt isolated and terrible about myself.

So I came to Playgroup with my neighbour/friend. I had a chat to Anna. When I first come to playgroup it was a bit daunting. I was only 19 and had a baby. I thought that all babies were like this (Bailey's behaviour) and that I must be a terrible mother not to be coping.

At the start, I felt so out of my depth at Playgroup... but I kept coming. I needed to. I needed help. I needed to see how other parents managed. I needed an outing and place to have rest from the isolation at home for a couple of hours... somewhere to go to for myself as well as Bailey.

Whilst I found it hard at first, my neighbour had said that I would be able to get help from NCC so I persevered. I've felt I had to keep going although I felt like an outcast. I was having all these negative thoughts... I thought everyone else was together and there was a 'clique', in-group... I felt like an outsider. I would have loved one of the other Mum's to say... "You're not a terrible Mum; it's all right, come and have a coffee". But I kept coming because I had to for Bailey. I found it easy to talk to Catherine, she supported me though these feelings. At that stage, I thought if they can't help me that was it!! I felt I needed support and that I had to keep coming (for survival).

Title: I need to be accepted and supported at this vulnerable time.

Bailey used to struggle with other children.., now he loves children and can relate to children of all ages. Because he has grown up with the Playgroup approach to socialising he has learned to interact well with other kids. It was also the same with Elijah. He's very active and 'full on'. He is getting better at playing with other kids in a big group. It gives him another 'normal' environment, at least, different for home and exposes him to other kids and situations.

Title: I had never thought to get down and communicate at the child's level. I thought... I'm the Mum... he's the kid... I tell him what to do! I just didn't have the skills I need to parent Bailey.

When I broke up with my husband I was a mess. The first place I went was here (to GB). Anna talked with me and helped me to find a way to function. They were open to me and they were willing to sit with me and talk. They made me feel important. They have time for anyone who needs time.

Title: They helped me to help my son.

I wouldn't have been able to manage Bailey, with autism and Elijah, who is full on if I hadn't developed the skills I have through the parenting courses.

Through the courses, I've learned to communicate effectively with Bailey and Elijah. I have learned to talk with Bailey at his level. I've learned to talk 'with him' rather than 'at him'. That's changed him a lot. Because he is autistic, he was struggling to understand what I was trying to say to him. When he can't understand he gets really frustrated and starts having Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ADS) tantrums. My improved communication skills have taken the frustration out of his life and boosted his self-confidence because he understands and now feels he can do things confidently.

When Bailey was first diagnosed with autism, at age 5, the paediatrician said that he was at 'low level functioning'. Now just 2 years later, the doctor has said that he has improved incredibly, and is

now classed as a 'high level functioning' child. He's in mainstream schooling, has fewer episodes, and is very affectionate as well as compassionate.

Nadine's Story

Getting involved

My girlfriend contacted Nambour Good Beginnings seeking some counselling support for me. I got some counselling with Anna. I did the DV course (with another organisation) and a time I was pregnant. That was good. When Talia was born I joined Playgroup.

Most Significant Changes

Title: I can see through her (my daughter) eyes now

The Nambour Good Beginnings courses have been really helpful – you can do them a couple of times because everything changes over time. Especially with the Parenting course... kids grow and change and parenting skills need to change too.

I really gained self awareness through the courses, for example I learned about "I" messages. So instead of blaming others for how I was feeling I could use the skills I learned... I could say.... " when you ..., I feel...". The parenting course helped me really understand my child ... to see things through their eyes. What has been most significant about seeing the world through my child's eyes is that my communication has changed... it's much gentler. So instead of arguing with the child I have other skills I can use...? I've learned how to NOT get cranky all the time.

This story is important to me because I understand things much better. When I had depression (following the birth of Kayla) and before I was put onto anti-depressants I was terrible. I felt that the whole world was against me. I felt nothing I did was right or good enough. It was sort of like when Kayla was born I forgot about Talia ...I felt so guilty.

When I did the parenting course I started to see things through Talia's eyes. It really cut me up. I could put myself in her place and see things the way she was seeing them. The parenting course was again really good. I had already done one after Talia, but I really got a lot out of a refresher course. Now days, if I feel I have been hard on her, I just go up to her and tell her that I am sorry that Mummy's not feeling well today and it is not her fault. You know, she's starting to tell me about how she feels too. So she's opening up about her feelings too.

I have participated in FS sessions, Parenting courses and playgroup. The combination has worked really well for me. I really like playgroup – for me like most Mum here it is our main social outlet. Playgroup is an opportunity to meet people and make friends.

Carmen's Story

Getting involved

I got involved with Nambour Good Beginnings via a support person who my doctor had referred to me whilst pregnant with my fourth child. I had asked him for assistance when my baby was born.

Being my fourth child, I was very aware of the depression that I would slip into building up to birthing my baby and my post natal depression afterward. So this support worker began visiting me every fortnight once my daughter came along just to check baby and me and after a few months she suggested bringing in another support worker for me to talk too about things that might be on my mind, hence, my introduction to Belinda from Nambour Good Beginnings.

Not long after my visits with Belinda began she suggested maybe going back to the doctor for a check up on my depression as I was isolating myself from society and had zero family support around me. He got me to do a Q10 form and diagnosed me as being manic-depressive, he referred me to a psychologist so I now had quite a few people helping me through this dark time.

Belinda had offered for me to come to a playgroup that good beginnings host every Tuesday. I showed up once and felt very awkward and did not go back because I did not know how to interact with other women especially as I had huge trust issues with women and I just felt safer in my cocoon that I had created at home, so I was happy for belinda and my other social worker to come to me and I was also okay bout' going to visit my psychologist but that was it for me.

Another while later Belinda asked me if I would be interested in doing a program that good beginnings was running called AAA – Aware Assertive Alive, I jumped at the chance once I knew that my baby could sit in the room with me and that there was option for childcare also if I had to bring my young son so committed to a 10week course which I have come to look forward too every year now, I have just finished my third year of what is now known as Personal Effectiveness Training (PET)and have told Belinda that as long as she runs it I will be there.

Title: Life changing - The constant help that I have received from Belinda has been great.

Definitely the constant support from Belinda, knowing she is there if I need her guidance and giving me opportunities to grow through the AAA courses which I have now attended 3 yrs running and also being around other women because I had struggled all my life with trusting women and being round' the women in the AAA courses helped me to trust women and enjoy being around them.

So for me the changes are gigantic, I was on anti-depressants during my pregnancy and very isolated before I met belinda where now I am very social, I managed my son's soccer team this year, last year I stopped taking anti-depressants, I actually have a few female friends now and I am very chatty, in fact it's hard to shut me up, I love it, my confidence and self esteem have improved 90%, my relationship with my children is filled with joy and laughter which blows me away because I was always a very serious mother f....r to be precise, I was fuelled with attitude, very hard to get close to and had no clue what feelings were, I was a reactor and I thought happy people were fake and liars and that happy families was a load of shit.

I thought I was tough and mysterious, I'm fairly certain I must have had a f..k off sign across my forehead cause I had no problem keeping people at a distance, including my first son, I loved him completely, fiercely and obsessively, from a distance though, I did not know how to be affectionate with him, or nurturing, all of my feelings for him were kept in my head, I was cool with him, I was his mate not his mum. I always regretted the way I raised my 1st son because the way I raise my children now is worlds away from my attempt at raising my big boy. Still he is a beautiful gentle and very humble human being and now I have no problem telling him how amazing I think he is and I have

made it my job to lead by example and to let him know often that if I had known what I know now back then I would have parented him this way. Through Belinda's help and my psychologist which I still see regularly also, I have learnt to forgive myself for my failures in raising my boy, I thought I was being his friend by letting him grow up in my world, I thought he didn't have a choice anyway, but I thought that my world was it, between the age of 23 and 28 I was introduced to ecstasy, cocaine, acid, so during that period I drank fairly excessively on top of all these new illicit drugs, Damian never saw me do stuff except drink or smoke cigarettes but he was there to see the highs and the lows, funny when you're in that world you think your protecting your child from your habits but don't think for a second about their experience of all of your behaviour shifts, madness. I remember spewing in my bathtub one evening and my son having to clean me up and put me to bed. He witnessed all my highs and lows, being completely high to days of deep depression, just a crazy ride, I would often keep him home from school if I were hung over to go get me hot chips from the shop or to ride into town to get me KFC, I was such a self absorbed bloody bitch, I think anyway. My son went over to NZ one year when my second son was 2 I think for a holiday with his dad I thought but he rang me from there and said he wasn't coming back because I was suffocating him. That was tough, but I understood cause' back then I never felt worthy of anybody's love and was always shocked if people stuck around. Now, I have conquered nicotine, alcohol all drugs, anti depressants, sleeping pills, I barely ever have Panadol any longer, my son and I have the most beautiful relationship I could ever hope for, I now feel very worthy of love of every kind and there is not a day that goes by where I don't feel like the luckiest girl on the planet.

The Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) Course has worked best in improving my relationships with my kids. I now have the skills to work through problems with my kids and I know other ways to do things. I no longer feel guilty, I feel incredibly blessed. The PET course is definitely priceless, the first year I attended I felt like an observer looking at foreign material, I'd made a promise to myself to just keep going anyhow purely cause I enjoyed everybody's company, the second year I had a lot of light bulbs go off and my awareness kicked into high gear, my ability to put my learning's into practice were limited though and my third year I felt that I was utilizing PTE's practices quite a lot in my life, so I am already pumped for next year's PET course.

This story is significant to me because there were many times during my life where I felt like I was in this deep hole and I would look out of this deep darkness toward a tiny ray of light, I would often wonder how on earth I could reach that light, now, through the last few years of extensive therapy, constant support from belinda and study of these amazing AAA courses and new found friendships I am bathing in that light. The dream I used to dream is now my reality and I finally realize that I put myself there by being willing to let people help and guide me.



Parent's Story (name withheld by request)

Getting involved

I came to be involved with Nambour Good Beginnings when my daughter was approximately one year old. I was given a leaflet by my community Child Health Care Nurse. I took her (my daughter) to the playgroup half a dozen times but as I was feeling constantly anxious I found the noise from all of the kids overwhelming. Also I was quite withdrawn and found it difficult to relate to the other mums in a group situation.

Most Significant Changes

Title: through Nambour Good Beginnings, my self-esteem and confidence has greatly increased.

I have found the fortnightly visits with Anna to be of a significant benefit to my daughter as well as myself. It has been extremely helpful to be able to talk to her about any concerns I have with my daughter and also any issues relating to the separation of her father and I. My support system had been extremely limited and to be able to sit down and have frequent discussions with Anna has been a real godsend. I cannot praise her and the program enough.

This story is significant to me because ... through Nambour Good Beginnings, my self-esteem and confidence has greatly increased. I am more focused and centred. Anna has encouraged me to start journaling as a way to sift through my thoughts, and I find this to be quite therapeutic. Also, at our most recent meeting, I mentioned I would like to return to work. There was some sort of fear holding me back from doing so, but we had a long chat about my dilemma and she really helped me to clarify it. I am now enrolled in a short TAFE course with the intention of working in the front office/reception of a hotel/resort and I am really... really excited!

I think just the opportunity to talk to someone has worked best for me. In the past I would ring lifeline to chat about things, but found it frustrating to have to keep repeating my story to different staff members to explain my history. Also, she has been great in regards to motivation.

Joanne's Story

Getting involved

I became involved with Good Beginnings when Jassy was six months old. She is now five years old. I was referred to the program by Nambour Community Health. At the time I was suffering Post Natal Depression and just cried all the time. I had no family in Australia. My pregnancy was unexpected and I had not planned to be a parent. I attended antenatal classes but people told me you will know what to do. I didn't ...

I would say to myself this is my child I have to do it. I was living with my mother in law and she would take charge sometimes but I would say ... 'The book says.....' and wouldn't let her do it. I was not prepared to let anyone in. I remember when I first introduced Jassy to solids. I was yelling at her because she would not eat them. I thought she should just know how to eat them.

I was not coping. I left isolated and not connected. I attended Playgroup but did not like it. I felt scared and nervous thinking that I would say the wrong thing. The Mothers there seemed to have their own circle of friends and they didn't talk to me. I felt excluded. However, I didn't want to go home as it was depressing.

Most Significant Changes

Title: I feel like I have found myself and my circle.

The most significant changes for me have occurred after attending the AAA (Aware, Assertive, Alive) Course. Before attending this course I was really weak and unstable. I had no friends. After listening to the group talk I found out I was not the only one who was feeling this way. I realised I was not a bad person. There were other people that were not coping too.... they are the same as me. The course has given me confidence to speak out more and I now know that I am important too. It has also provided a connection for me to other people. I will go up and talk to other girls now.

After completing the AAA Course I started approaching Mother's at playgroup. I was feeling more confident and knowing that they are the same as me has allowed me to find my circle of friends. I have just found it so much easier to 'talk to the other girls'. I even approached a new person who had just started with Playgroup. We became friends and I 'visited her at her house.

I can now look at other Mum's and not think that they are thinking She's looking at me funny?. After talking with my friends I find myself saying I will try that!

Title: My children are learning to share Mum

The Volunteer Community Parent- home visiting service has worked best for me. I have a volunteer, named Heidi, who comes to my house every Tuesday. This has been happening since November last year.

She was asked to assist with my children accepting new people into my house and to provide more time for me and Jassy to spend together. My second daughter Sephra is a very sick child and takes up most of my time. I have spent weeks at the hospital with her and Jassy is left without me. Jassy and I don't have a very good bond.

The children use to cry when Heidi looked at them and when she helped me bath them they would scream all the time. They are good now, they spend time playing with Heidi and have accepted her into the house. They are learning to share Mum.

Tom's Story

Getting involved

I was referred through Disability Services Queensland. My son, Peter, has a disability.

I first came to Playgroup with my partner when Peter was still in a stroller. However, she has stopped attending PG now.

I have also attended Parenting courses (P5) as well as Protective Behaviour that was run through Family Planning. Both were very good.

Most Significant Changes

Title: Tuesday is my social day

Tuesday's are my socialising day each week. This is really important for me. I miss socialising as my friends are in Brisbane.

I come to Playgroup and I can talk to other parents about parenting. Peter was good when he was a baby. However, he was an asthmatic and we had some pretty big dramas with his breathing problems. But he is changing all the time. For example, he is a bit wilful and when he is being resistant to what I am telling him and I am getting all heated up, I can send him to his room for time out. Just 10 minutes, that can work. Also another example is getting get a child to eat certain foods... and to eat what you are eating? I've learned that you can say.... If you don't eat so and so, whatever I have cooked, then you won't get any sweets.

This story is significant for me because I don't get out very often. I come to Playgroup for socialising. It's good to come and spend a day with the ladies.

Title: I get to learn new strategies to deal with my child.

The parenting courses gave me a different perspective than I had at the time and I began to understand how a child changes (over time). It's really important for me as my partner is not as involved in the parenting these days as I am, and I enjoy talking and learning with other parents. I also enjoy watching videos/TV programs to learn about parenting.

Sharon's Story

Getting involved

I can't remember if I was referred from the Nambour Community Health Centre, or through the therapists. I was taking my son to the Nambour General Hospital at the time. It was about six years ago. My son may have just turned two.

Most Significant Changes

Title: We caught up with my sons friend again who also was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

I attend playgroup with my son Cailitin. He was about two at the time. I liked Playgroup it was well equipped and well resourced with toys, inside and outside play equipment that was fenced. My son became friends with another boy. I remember when my son and the other boy were playing in the tent with a tunnel. They were both lying down next to each other in the tent and laughing together. It wasn't at anything in particular. They were just laughing together. It was so sweet to see.

Unfortunately, there was an instance in which my son took a drum off another child who was playing with it. The Mum got offended and spoke to my son abruptly and about him taking the drum and told him to give it back to her. This was a bit upsetting. Another thing my son used to do was open and close the sliding door to the outside play area continuously, which was posing a safety risk to other children who were going through the door. After these events I was not confident about attending Playgroup. My son didn't know how to properly interact with the other children. He had speech difficulties and at times would hit out at other kids. Then, at two years and seven months my son was diagnosed with Autism.

If people were more understanding of Autism and what children with Autism may do at times and that they are not being malicious or intentional in any way I would have continued attending playgroup.

However, three years later we caught up with the boy my son was friends with in Playgroup. The boy was diagnosed later as having Aspergers disorder which is along the lines Autism Spectrum Disorder. He attends the Early Childhood Development centre at Burnside State School. The centre is an early intervention unit for children up to the age of six with special needs.

Title: Allows me to have time out once a fortnight from what we have to deal with each day

I have three boys diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), so having a volunteer come into my house once a fortnight helps me to 'recharge the batteries'.

We have had a few volunteers over the years because sometimes they have to leave for other commitments. We had a couple of male volunteers who came in once. This was great for my husband as he had a male to talk to. It's nice to just sit down and have a chat. On occasions we have gone out for coffee and cake.

Title: Realising we are not alone with our day to day struggles and being reassured we will come through it alright.

Belinda was great for my husband and me to talk to. It was nice to know that we weren't alone battling financial struggles and other everyday struggles. Belinda really helped us realise that. Belinda also shared similar views as me about why things happen as they do and she also helped us believe that we will come through whatever battles we face.

We don't see Belinda anymore due to her other commitments but Anna comes once a fortnight. We sometimes go out for coffee and cake as well. We also find Anna is very interested in finding out more about Autism and how it affects people who have Autism and the people who care for them. We hope we can share our experiences and help other families who may be experiencing what we are.

Belinda and Anna have both been involved in letting me know about services that can assist my family. They helped me with things I needed to do at Centrelink or extra services that I may be entitled to. They also organised a Christmas Hamper for my family from the Smith Family when we were experiencing difficult times.

Connie's Story

Getting involved

I first contacted NAMBOUR GOOD BEGINNINGS when my daughter was a little baby. I saw an advertisement in the paper. I was experiencing a lot of domestic violence (DV). I need to get out of the house and meet other parents. I started with Playgroup, then later did the parenting course and had a volunteer home visitor.

Most Significant Changes

Title: I can't find the words to describe how much I appreciate the people at GB.

At playgroup it was good to meet other parents but my child had ASD (Aspergers) and I felt we were on a different level. I found other aspects of Nambour Good Beginnings programs more helpful and didn't continue with Playgroup.

Doing the parenting course, I learned to deal with behaviour issues. I learned some really good skills through the parenting courses. I learned active listening ... so I now let my children finish what they are trying to say, instead of jumping in

I also learned to deal with behaviour issues. For example when the kids are acting inappropriately, I ignore inappropriate behaviour; I turn the other way now, instead of jumping up and down.

I've had a hard time over the years; the father of my children is violent. They have always been there to help. They also referred me to SCOPE (DV service)... that was helpful. I'm a strong person, but at times of crisis it all gets a bit much... it's then that it's important to talk to someone. There have been times when I have been dealing with death threats, the workers talked to me. The workers at GB have always been there to help. They go out of their way and they give not 100% but 110%... their hearts are in it! I can't find the words to describe how much I appreciate the people at GB.

The Volunteer Community Parent' home visiting helped me manage to keep going. The challenges I was facing were the DV situation as well as my son with mild Aspergers and ADHD. He had special needs. He was really 'full on' and would act out violently sometimes and the volunteer helped me manage to keep going. She would spend time with the kids and give me a bit of 'time out', time to think in the garden. I have very little family support as my father has been unwell for many years and require lots of care. I didn't want to add to their burdens, so I was quite alone. Anyway, it has all worked out ...and my son is now getting straight A's at school.

This story is significant to me because I had very little family support, a child with special needs and I was being victimised by the father of my children ... I needed help to learn new skills, encouragement and support to keep going and help in crisis situations.

Louise's Story

Getting involved

I got involved with Playgroup when I was pregnant with the twins (about 18months ago). I was referred to Good Beginnings by the Child Health Nurse, I think. I was referred because I was very tired and stressed out and I wasn't sure how I was going to cope with the twins when they were born. I also wanted to get Eliska (now three and a half years old) involved with socialising with other children. I also attend the Mum's group at the Nambour Child Health Clinic.

Most Significant Changes

Title: Improved confidence and stress relief.

What been the most significant change for me has been the opportunity to socialise, that is, having people, adults I mean, to have a conversation with that doesn't include the word 'Why'. When I get to Playgroup I instantly feel better as I can relax and unwind. Being around other adults is really important for me. I can share my thoughts and feelings. I can also share my experiences of parenting and swap stories with other parents. It helps me understand and normalise my children's behaviour... it makes me more confident as a parent. Having coffee and talking with other Mum's is really helpful and important to me.

By exposing Eliska to other children of different ages, she finds it a lot easier to 'stand up for herself'. She seems to have developed a better understanding of how children of different ages act ... she has also has improved confidence.

This is all significant to me because I feel isolated and stressed spending long periods of time with the children without adult conversation.

Tanya's Story

Getting involved

My doctor recommended that I attend GB to get out of the house and mix with other parents. So I popped into the NCC and enquired and started with playgroup the following day. At that stage Amber was just under 12 months.

Most Significant Changes

Title: *Amber has come out of herself ... We've both come out of ourselves.*

Amber has really community out of herself since she's been coming to playgroup. In some ways she's a bit of a bully... but also she shares more with the other children. She just loves coming the playgroup.

Playgroup is great for me too. I am a very shy person. It takes a lot for me to come out of myself. I was isolated from other parents and people, in general... it gives me an opportunity to socialise and make friends. But I am more open now. When I am not at playgroup I am basically at home. Mum and Dad are the only people I talk to. I can open up here with other women and share my feelings. I look forward to coming here on Tuesdays.... even if its training we still come!

Pam's Story

Getting involved

About one year ago I separated from my husband and was suffering depression and anxiety. I had three children at school and one child at home. I was attending counselling at Centrelink and they referred me to the Nambour Good Beginnings Program for family support and financial assistance. I was advised someone would contact me via phone. My mobile phone had been disconnected so I could not receive calls. I decided to come into the Community Centre and at the time I spoke to Belinda. She made an appointment for me and I have been seeing Anna since that time for family support. Anna (also) referred me to the Salvation Army which helped me with my finances.

I have attended Playgroup approximately ten times over a one year period. I tend to isolate myself but make myself come to get out of the house. However I feel I don't fit in and can't talk to people. I sometimes feel I am being judged. I will keep coming because as Lily gets older it will be good interaction for her.

Most Significant Changes

Title: *I can see our relationship has improved and that makes me feel good.*

I attended a Parenting (P5) Course which I found to be a real eye opener. This course taught me to talk through issues and showed me how to turn my negative thoughts into something positive. It also helped to give me confidence and build my self esteem. I started to look at the way I spoke to my kids. I started to ask myself ... 'whose problem is it?'. I reflected on why I looked at things that way.

As the course is run as a group it allowed me to meet other parents. It was great to talk with other people to hear what they had to say. Because this made me realise I'm not the only one feeling bad. The group structure has also linked me up with two ladies at my school. These ladies also participated in the course. When I saw them I approached them and we made the connection with how we knew each other from the P5 course. I have spoken to them about the course. We now talk about different ways to parent and talk about issues that may be occurring with our children.

This story was significant to me because I been able to improve my relationship with my eldest son Brody. Things were pretty bad with my eldest son. I didn't have a relationship with him. He would never come up to me and discuss anything with me. He would just let it build up – build up and then he would 'snap'. The P5 course demonstrated to me the importance of spending time with each

child. Making sure I was playing attention to him. It provided strategies to do this via communication. So each night I go into my son's room and we have a one on one conversation about the day. I ask him questions like ...'How was your day?' and 'What have you enjoyed about today?'. I can see our relationship has improved and that makes me feel good. It has had a big impact on my family.

Tanya S's Story

Getting involved

I became involved after my children and I moved to Nambour for better education, medical treatment, work and improvement in our life. We came from Moree, and we were referred to GB from the Nambour Hospital Social worker for support whilst we fighting through the Family Law Court and abuse allegations. The idea was to get a support network for my children to improve their lives and get my son, Hizayer diagnosed. Also to stop me children being 'picked on' by their father (a police officer) and to stop being followed by police cars (as was happening in Moree).

Most Significant Changes

Title: *Dreams can come true improving our lives.*

We won the right to stay in Nambour (through the Family Court). We have had Hizayer diagnosed with major intolerance to foods and a leaky gut. He is now not as sick and is growing slowly whilst sticking to a strict diet. Haywin has found that he fits into Nambour High Scholl and no longer gets teased by children as he is smart. Harlon has gone from 'D's' and 'C's' at school to being diagnosed with ADHD to straight 'A's' and achieving well both at school and at home whilst playing violin and learning to control his anger. Harmonie, too, is in the process for ADHD.

My parenting skills and coping mechanisms have improved with perspective. I have adapted – we use services to (help us) adequately meet our needs.

I am now employed full time at Nambour Hospital. I have just purchased our first home (waiting to sign the papers). We have purchased a KIA 'carnival' bus in which we can all (myself and four children) travel comfortably with heaps of room.

We will work as a team to have a calmer more loving atmosphere (in our family). From my experience I now think... you can strive and achieve... just never give up ... Dreams can come true!



2. Volunteer Community Parents' Stories

Janet's story

Getting involved

I used to work as a Family Support Worker in Sydney in the '90's and I really enjoyed the work. I discovered how important that level of support is for families, especially vulnerable families with small children.

Volunteering has also been an important part of my life and I wanted to be doing something that would continue after I retire from paid work. I think volunteering is very important for creating healthy communities.

Also I have grand children but they live interstate, so it nice to have a young family to connect with. I contacted Good Beginnings in late 2008 and was placed with a family in early 2009.

Most Significant Changes

Title: "It's a nice feeling to be accepted just as I am and for me to accept them ... just as they are"
What's special is that I feel accepted by the family, sort of like a member of the extended family. As I get to know them better I discover each person's individuality and it makes for a rich experience. They are really respectful towards me. They don't ask me lots of questions about my personal situation and I am careful not to be intrusive towards them as well. I let them take the lead and I just go along with the flow. It's a nice feeling to be accepted just as I am and for me to accept them ... just as they are.

Heidi's story

Getting involved

I became involved with Nambour Good Beginnings in 2002 after returning from living in America. During my time in America I had a daughter, when my daughter was six months old I accidentally dropped her and upon seeking medical attention had her removed from my care. After 2 years, a long legal battle and a lot of cultural misunderstandings, I regained custody of my daughter and was found innocent of any wrong doing the authorities thought may have happened.

When I returned to Australia I returned with goals of being able to make my community a better place. I read about Nambour Good Beginnings in the local paper and believed it was a service of value and signed up to become a volunteer. It also assisted me with my own education as at the time I was studying Diploma in Community Welfare Work at Sunshine Coast TAFE.

Most Significant Changes

Title: *Every story is unique and every interpretation is different, my story just is.*

I have felt more supported by my community and have improved my education through being a Volunteer Community Parent with Nambour Good Beginnings. I have attended training sessions and meetings, attended playgroup and built lasting friendships.

I have found the family support service works both ways, I have provided support to the families I have worked with but also the service and coordinators have supported me and my family.

As a Volunteer Community Parent and graduate of the Diploma of Community Welfare Work course I have completed both the Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T) offered by Nambour Good Beginnings and the P5 course offered through another service of the same nature. Both courses have their good and bad points. As a volunteer I have used strategies from both to assist parents and myself with different situations. I do not believe any one course holds the answer as every situation is different.

Providing in home visits works well for me as a volunteer. It allows me and the family to find a time that suits us both. It also allows us to understand the family better and any issues they may be concerned about as often seeing is easier than explaining. It has also allowed for flexibility in the planning of activities as some weeks I would plan a visit outside the home in the local community.

Playgroup is fun and a great way to make friends. As a volunteer it also meant I often had a rapport with the family I would work with before becoming their volunteer. It also made the families feel comfortable with me as I was a parent just like them and did not hold myself to some higher office as some government welfare workers do.

Nambour Good Beginnings provided me with ease of access to information, advice and referrals for the families I worked with. I could often debrief with one of the coordinators and if I had concerns about any issues new I had unbiased ears to listen. If I felt a family needed more support than I could provided my coordinators would assists in gaining any extra support required.

Title: Changes in the families - restoration of self-esteem and having fun as a family

As I have worked with a number of families I have noticed some changes that are across the board and some that stick with a particular family. Most common is the restoration of self-esteem and confidence in the mother's. Also changes in their ability to have simple fun as a family and a lot more laughter in the households. As my child often accompanies me I have also noticed that the behaviour of the children in these families' changes and their play becomes less complicated and their personal skill with their dealings with each other improves. Any problems with interaction lessen and the mother's also relax instead of waiting for conflict.

I also tend to encourage making use of your local community, going to parks, libraries and free functions put on by local councils or businesses. This tends to make the families less isolated and more involved with their community building their own friendships along the way.

As with all things I am just a stepping stone, when I am no longer needed I move on and so do the families I work with. Every story is unique and every interpretation is different, my story just is!

Norma's story

Getting involved

I saw the advertisement in the paper and I thought... 'we have all had the feeling that there are people out there that just need a bit of support ... I can do that, I thought ... I can help.'

I retired 2 years ago. I had always worked in retail and with people. I felt I needed to get back out into the public and community. All of a sudden you have time for yourself and time to provide a little support to others.

I am a grandmother of 12. They live all over the country, none close by, although they visit regularly and I am in contact all the time. A grandparent sees things a bit differently from parents – I think a grandparent's perspective is valuable for the grandchildren as well as their parents.

Most Significant Changes

Title: Enlightening experience

I have not been officially accepted into the GB program as yet... it is still in progress. I am hoping to become a Volunteer Community Parent. But the thing that has been significant in getting involved with the GB program, to date, has been the parenting/communication course I have just completed. I was here to learn how to support parents. The course has given me all I need to know to embark on this new voluntary work of supporting parents.

Sometimes you think you know yourself pretty well, but the course has given me another slant of myself and others. I could relate to all the other girls on the course, many were parents and I could see things from a parent's point of view.

Helen's story

Getting involved

I have been a volunteer for many years with different organisations and at that time found out about Good Beginnings, I was completing a counselling skills course with Lifeline. I believe the Nambour Good Beginnings program presented 'a calling' for me. I had just experienced trauma in my life and I noticed their advertisement in the local paper. I have been with the Program for nine years. I started in 2001.

Other aspect that attracted me to the program was "my own experience". I was as a mother of three children, including twins. I lived in Cairns until my twins were 18 months old. There were no organisations in Cairns that provided assistance for mother's with twins. I was far away from my family and my husband worked long hours. I felt isolated with no family around me. I remember when my twins were 10 months old and my Uncle, Aunty and teenage nephews visited me. They spent all day amusing and playing with the twins. My Aunty even helped with cooking dinner. I was just so great to have this constant support.

Also I am a grandmother who does not see her granddaughter very often. I see great value in families having grandparents around and enjoy working with parents to provide that role model.

Most Significant Changes

Title: Alliance sense of being needed

The most significant change for me, due to my volunteer role, is gaining a 'sense of being needed'.

The co-ordinators of the Program provide great support to me and I feel valued as a volunteer. They connect me with families in which Mothers are "looking for a mother figure". This hasn't been an intentional thing but is the way it has turned out. Mothers say to me "You don't know what you do for me?" what they don't understand is what they give back to me.

I have been connected with many families over the nine years and I have stayed in contact with some. Some move away and then come back making contact with me again. Others I just pop in and have a cuppa with every now and then.

Another significant change for me was the realisation that I can't fix families problems. I have learnt to take on a role in which I "walk along side" them. I understand their needs are changing constantly so I allow them to decide what is needed. It may just be "having a cuppa" or it may entail some sort of "practical help". This may include playing with the children, going to the park or going shopping.

My connection with families may be brief and families will always come and go from the local area. However, there is always a connection with them.

I "understand what is going on" with their family and I can relate to it because I 'know what it is like". By understanding the families they feel they "don't have to explain themselves over and over". Families have appreciated me.

Sharone's story

Getting involved

I came to GB approximately 4 years ago to join the Volunteer Community Parent program and to assist families but discovered I was more suited to assisting in the 'inner child' play with many children, where I could be of more benefit.

Most Significant Changes

Title: More fun is necessary in life

I have numerous stories but I feel it boils down to the fact that the time in playgroups extends beyond the dynamics and space of NAMBOUR GOOD BEGINNINGS. We are all part of humanity – we all want to be acknowledged and loved for who we are. I notice this especially when I have the children on my own (at playgroup). They set the pace of the time – if they are super heroes or cheetahs, I run with that. I listen carefully to what they are saying or demonstrating and their feelings just flow – from sadness, anger to joy but really they just want to have FUN!

It is significant because we all need to recognise the innocence, wonder, wisdom and worth of all children. They are our greatest gift and resource. They are far wiser and free than us adults – we need to cherish and encourage their free will and individuality.

I have discovered my own 'inner child' in this environment – I feel it is an honour for me to have spent and still spending time with the parents and the children in a safe, fun, dynamic setting.

Petra's story

Getting involved

In 2003 I became a Volunteer Community Parent at Nambour Good Beginnings and was placed with a young mum with intellectual difficulties and her 18 month old child. I was a VCP for this family for 2 ½ years.

Most Significant Changes

Title: It takes a village to raise a child

My experience working with a young mother was significant because I realised that life does not always give us everything we want and need but if we can give emotional and physical support to those that are not coping with their situation then hopefully we can assist them to find the resilience in themselves to get over the hurdles that are there. While providing this support to parents we are also there supporting the children. We all need people in our lives that believe we are alright.

During my time with this young mum she was able to feed back her insecurities around her understanding of her child's developmental needs. This mum loved her child dearly but struggled in her parenting role due to her own intellectual disabilities. During my time with her she continued to need support but embraced whole heartily any parenting skills information and worked with the Nambour Good Beginnings coordinator and myself in a plan to support not only her in her parenting role but to protect and support her child so that he was safe and his social and emotional needs were being met. She was assessed by the Nambour Good Beginnings coordinator as needing more complex support and was referred to the Better Start program. I had developed a strong relationship with her as her VCP so I was transferred with her to Better Start.

With Nambour Good Beginnings Family Support Worker, myself, Nambour Good Beginnings Coordinator and Better Start we were able to give this young mum the support she needed to provide for her child socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically. She eventually moved back home so her mother could provide family support. This was a parent that would continue to need support so for her to realise that her own family could provide this support base was a good outcome and at the same time she left with a better understanding of her child's needs and greater confidence in her role as a parent.

For this family it was the combination of all the supports and referrals that assisted this mum in her role of caring for her child. Family support services and VCP's gave this mum an avenue to express her doubts and concerns with raising her child and her need to balance her life intellectually and emotionally. Playgroup gave this mum and child an avenue to bond together through play and also

to meet other parents in the community, therefore preventing isolation. For the child there were the added socialisation skills that were enhanced through engagement with other children. This child was also placed in day-care to give extra support to mum and for the child to provide socialisation skills, develop peer relationships and child protective factors. Information and referral to other services allowed this family to further develop and gain emotional confidence and build resilience to meet the daily challenges of parenting.



3. Staff Stories

The Nambour Good Beginnings' program has 3 part time staff who are supported by Nambour Community Centre (NCC) Coordinator in some aspects of program administration and management.

- Belinda is the Nambour Good Beginnings Coordinator and Senior Family Support Worker
- Anna is the Family Support Worker
- Petra is the Administration Assistant
- Mark is the NCC Coordinator.

The previous Nambour Good Beginnings Coordinator was Kathryn Tonges, who established the program is mentioned in some of the parents' stories that follow.

Belinda's story

What does Good Beginnings mean for you?

Nambour Good Beginnings is my primary work place and at this stage of my working life, an integral aspect of my professional identity. The program has given me an opportunity to put my strengths and professional attributes to work fully. I know that I have made some positive contribution to family relationships by working towards modelling positive communication skills to people.

Relationships, for me, are the most significant aspects of working with families. I have become increasingly aware of the importance of this the longer I have worked in this role here at Good Beginnings. If the relationship is established, from the outset, on respectful foundations (the non-expert position), is not hurried toward a quick and bureaucratic conclusion then the more successful family outcomes are evidenced. Taking the time to develop a clear picture of what the individual parent is thinking and how they perceive themselves is the platform for developing support plans

I know realise 'it's about the children via their parents'. This realisation helps me pull together several aspects of the program's historical practice framework together so as to make more sense of my overall feelings about 'most significant change' in families, staff and volunteers.

I have come to conclude from the six and a half years of doing this work that there is a common thread that runs through a majority of the families that come to our attention. It is that there is a whole new generation of parents who themselves have no road map for their role as a parent. Some new parents have been parented in sub-optimal ways. This is not to condemn their parents, because we know that most parents do the best they can with the resources that are available to them. Thus it is the quality of the relationship developed by the Good Beginnings program between family members, parents and children, which sets the stage for healthy interactions within the family and further influences how then these family members engage in the wider community. It is all about communication, trust and skill development and just being ready to field whatever new things arise in and during the process. When the parents come to rely on the security of the working relationship they tend to make themselves more open to support and being open to other possibilities.

I am always conscious about getting as much information from any referring agency/person before I make contact with the family. As the families need to give permission for the referring agency to

make contact with us I have always considered that the family should know what expectations the agency has of us and the family. It is essential to establish the ideas that an outsider may have considered relevant for the families. I take time on initial visits to make this information transparent to the parent and I share what thoughts and ideas were given to us at the time of the referral. This gives the parent a real sense of control and builds trust. It puts them in the picture and of course provides an opportunity to correct the information, so it fits with them. From there often times we discuss many issues around how things are, how they could be different and what aspects of their lives could do with change. Validating parents and highlighting their successes is often significant and can evoke quite an emotional response. Needless to say many parents have had little or no positive feedback, and often have exhausted themselves trying to live up to outside and unrealistic expectations - alone.

Many parents, especially woman find it difficult to remove the mask that they feel necessary to wear in case someone comes to criticise or worse still remove the children. Frequently their story is about how they have little support from family or partners and seem to have been travelling the path on instinct alone – thus having some confidentiality around telling their story is paramount to their relationship with us. I often liken it to having a rest. Being really honest about how you think and feel and allowing them to unpack their frustrations. To voice their disappointments and to redeem, retrieve their efforts, successes and themselves in front of an unconditional witness. This is frequently the most significant change that I notice – that parents realise their efforts and how much their children depend upon them.

The play group – well that is steeped in history and interesting twists and turns. It has taken on the venue for social skill development and this has in turn created many learning opportunities for the facilitator and the clients as well.

The opportunity to work closely with families in the region has provided many benefits. I get to reconnecting with the sublime surrender of childhood and I can even be silly and noisy and am learning to be okay with it. I can sit on the floor and just be with children sometimes. At the other end of the practice, networking with other service providers and hearing their stories, I know that there are other agencies that can share the workload.

However, there have been challenges and frustrations as well. I still hurt from the inside when I see tough stuff going on in families or the program ... I am still coming to terms with the fact that I am not God ... I can't make everything alright!

There is never enough time or enough money in the program to support the model we deliver. So I find myself feeling tired lots of the time. I struggle with putting others before myself and getting worn out and thinking I am doing too much. I sometime feel frustrated because some people are not ready to do things differently and I have, at times over the past 6 years, found the program too structured. Sometimes I have felt like I am the odd one out and that nobody is like me personally or professionally. Some people are very different to me and that is quite often okay. I am learning to let some things slide. However, I will write a book one day about how to do this kind of work

Anna's story

Getting involved

I first heard about Good Beginnings while on field placement here at the Community Centre during my studies in 2000. The Community Centre was working on a submission for funding to have the Good Beginnings program here at the centre. I actually applied for the Family Support Workers position at the time, however, I had not completed my studies and had quite a way to go. I worked with the Domestic Violence counsellor as a volunteer at the time and later after completing my advanced diploma in counselling I got the locum position as the DV Counsellor. The then Good Beginnings worker and I collaborated quite a bit as we referred respective families to each other. When my job came to an end in late 2002 she asked if I would like to work part time with Good Beginnings. This then later developed into a permanent job for which I am still grateful for as this was the area I was passionate about working in.

Most Significant Changes

Title: Good Beginnings for me is about supporting parents

I remember reading a book called 'Beyond Child Abuse' from St Lukes during my studies at TAFE, this was basically about a family support agency and how they worked with families to resolve issues to protect children from further child abuse. It showed me that many families are vulnerable and may be experiencing issues, however they genuinely cared for their children. It was only their inability, lack of knowledge or their own past experiences that resulted in how they parented their children. I knew then that this was the area I wanted to work in.

Good Beginnings for me is about supporting parents to give their children a good beginning in life. I really value working here at Good Beginnings because my belief is that people do the best they can with the information and knowledge they have and when they receive different information and gain other knowledge they will do it differently. Good Beginnings allows for that and I feel privileged and humble to be part of that. I believe parents are the experts in their lives and I feel I learn just as much from them in that every situation is different and this allows me to gain knowledge and understanding of situations and the complexities of families and individual experiences.

Title: I feel I am really able to contribute in assisting families to move forward through understanding, listening and being there for them

One of the most significant changes for me I guess was when Kathryn our previous coordinator left and Belinda took over. I had been working with Good Beginnings on a part time basis and that changed to 32 hours a week. In that time I feel I have become much more confident as a Family Support Worker. Before working full time I had limited time with both workers and families hence limited knowledge of the program. As well as doing individual family support work I facilitate the play group and personally know the families. This both assists me to support them more effectively and may help them feel more comfortable knowing me better.

Other significant changes happened when I attended training. For example, when I did the P5 training course to run parenting groups, I gained a better understanding of the purposes of behaviours in children and that it is better to allow consequences to occur rather than punish the child. This in turn enabled me to not only facilitate parenting courses but work more effectively with

parents to assist them to really understand what may be happening with their child so they can behave accordingly. Children behave to get some need met even though they may not get what they want they do need their parents to understand how they feel. By acknowledging the child's feelings the child feels heard and is able to move on from what they are upset about. I feel I am really able to contribute in assisting families to move forward through understanding, listening and being there for them.

Petra's story

Getting involved

I was a student at TAFE in 2002 when I became aware of children needing foster care placement. While agreeing that there is a need for children to have a safe and secure home, my values and beliefs are that with information and support many parents that have struggled with raising their children would manage without further traumatising children by placing them 'in care' of the State.

Most Significant Changes

Title: It takes a village...

In 2003 I became a Volunteer Community Parent at Nambour Good Beginnings and was placed with a young mum with intellectual difficulties and her 18 month old child. I was a VCP for this family for 2 ½ years.

The experience of working with this family made me realise that life does not always give us everything we want and need but if we can give emotional and physical support to those that are not coping with their situation then hopefully we can assist them to find the resilience in themselves to get over the hurdles that are there. While providing this support to parents we are also there supporting the children. We all need people in our lives that believe we are alright.

I now work in the Nambour Good Beginnings in an administrative role on a part time basis supported the Family Support workers. Having had the experience of being a Nambour Good Beginnings Volunteer Community Parent really helped me understand why the work is so vital and what a difference it can make to families who are struggling.



Marks' story

Title: There is something about the resilience of the human spirit in some of these stories, people toughing it out to force a better change in their life ... (being) really courageous.

My first reaction to reading through the stories that had been offered by program participants was that I felt privileged that these people are prepared to share their stories and thoughts they way they have. Also the fact that there is so much amazingly positive stuff that has been offered makes me really pleased to have a contributing role with the other three people currently in Nambour Good Beginnings, as well as the people who have historically developed the program. I hope that it has this kind of effect on Belinda, Anna, Petra and the volunteers as it is a big golden tick for their work over all this time.

I probably didn't expect the comments and stories to place as much emphasis on the social aspect as they have - overcoming isolation, enabling social interaction, connectedness, my social outing etc.. It got me thinking that while Nambour Good Beginnings claims to 'encourage healthy families' what it really does is try and support people who just happen to also be parents. So there is some similarity with the Kenilworth evaluation here that we did last year. It's about children via their parent/s.

I sort of expected that the building of confidence in individuals, both through the family support and the group work would have been the other big thing. It seemed to me that for some of the stories it was almost a mapped out process where people wanted a bit of a hand to individually feel comfy or better with themselves and then they transitioned to the group and that was their next level in personal development. I'm not sure ... but I think these stories give us a bit of guidance as to the steps that some people might like support to move through.

I was a little surprised that a couple stories mentioned 'counselling' rather than 'support' as the service they received so that was interesting. I guess bit of a fine line between counselling and support so working in this area is a bit tricky.

Reading the stories from a couple of the parents where they talked around how they were going to continue coming to playgroup regardless of their level of discomfort because they knew they had to do that for their kids was great gutsy stuff. There is something about the resilience of the human spirit in some of these stories, people toughing it out to force a better change in their life that is really courageous. It made me a little emotional even ... and it couldn't be put more eloquently than how it has been described in their stories.

So out of all the stories the ones that made a particular impression on me were the ones that said something about the measure and true worth of the story teller themselves. I wondered if these people would consider themselves leaders in their family, extended family and maybe community.

Significant Changes

Significant changes – program objectives based analysis of parents’ stories

The 14 parents who participated in the evaluation represented a cross section of Nambour Good Beginnings “clients” as many of them self identified that they had had experiences which were similar to matters identified with the broader “client group”. For example experiences such as depression, in particular, post-natal depression and its impact on parenting were mentioned, another parent had multiple births and six other were struggling with parenting largely due to having children with special needs. Two others were experiencing severe family issues including domestic violence and acrimonious family breakdown at the time of their initial referral. Many of the participants also self identified as feeling like isolated parents.

The 14 parents who participated were initially referred to Nambour Good Beginnings from the following places, Child Health, Community Health, local doctors, Nambour General Hospital, Centrelink, neighbours or friends and one parent saw an advertisement in the local paper.

The stories of significant changes told by parents were gathered into ‘domains of significance’ based on the Nambour Good Beginnings program objectives. They were then shared via story boards and ranked for second level significance at a Friday night Family BBQ event and later at Nambour Playgroup session. Most of the participants (about three quarters) were present at either of these events and gave an indication of which themes coming through the story excerpts were most significant and most resonated with their experiences.

As stated earlier in this report, the domains of significance presented to participants were as follows:

- i. Changes in your or your children’s well being
- ii. Changes in your knowledge about parenting or services available to you
- iii. Changes in your confidence in parenting
- iv. Changes in how your family functions
- v. Changes in your social connections and support

The strongest feedback about significance overall from parents were in the following aspects within these domains:

- Increased socialisation opportunities and social connections for parents and children, especially through Playgroup and parenting courses.
- Greatly increased knowledge and skills of parenting, based on increased in self awareness and communication skills
- Greatly improved relationships with their children
- Improvements in child well being through increased parental capacity, family support and access to services.

The following story excerpts provide more insight into the experiences of significant change from parents’ perspective within the enquiry domains.

i. Changes in child well being

Improved child well being is reported by many parents as having flowed from their involvement at Nambour Good Beginnings. One parent with two boys, one with autism, said: “They helped me help

my son. ... My child used to struggle with other children. Now he loves children and can relate to children of all ages. Several families in the program have children who have been diagnosed with ASD however not all find the program most suited to their particular needs.

Overall parents attributed this improvement in child well being to the following factors:

- Having developed their parenting skills,
- Being supported by professional support workers,
- Having other parents to socialise with,
- Being encouraged by other parents,
- Being supported to work on and through their own personal issues that were impacting on their families,
- Learning to look after themselves,
- Providing affirmation to them 'to be themselves',
- Build on their strengths and to 'follow their dreams'.

Many parents noted that their children had 'come out of themselves' and had better confidence around other children and adults.

ii. Changes in parents' knowledge about parenting or services available to you

All parents who participated in the parenting, communication and self awareness courses expressed high levels of improvement in knowledge and skills in parenting. Many repeat the courses, finding that they learn more each time and realise that their skills need to develop as their children grow. There are many story excerpts that could evidence how effective the parenting and other courses are to developing parent's knowledge and skills and connections with others. For example, Carmen's story was identified by many participants as being particularly significant for them. In her story she said, "I thought I was tough and mysterious ... I had no problem keeping people at a distance, including my first son, I loved him completely, fiercely and obsessively, from a distance though, I did not know how to be affectionate with him, or nurturing, all of my feelings for him were kept in my head, I was cool with him, I was his mate not his mum. I always regretted the way I raised my 1st son because the way I raise my children now is worlds away from my attempt at raising my big boy." ... she added, "The Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) Course has worked best in improving my relationships with my kids. I now have the skills to work through problems with my kids and I know other ways to do things. I no longer feel guilty, I feel incredibly blessed ... the first year I attended I felt like an observer looking at foreign material, I'd made a promise to myself to just keep going anyhow purely cause I enjoyed everybody's company, the second year I had a lot of light bulbs go off and my awareness kicked into high gear, my ability to put my learning's into practice were limited though and my third year I felt that I was utilising PET's practices quite a lot in my life, so I am already pumped for next year's PET course."

Several parents noted that they really appreciated that child minding was provided on the premises, next door to the parenting course group room. For example Nancy said, "It's great to have the children looked after next door by someone they know and trust when you are doing the course. You can hear them and go to them, if need be. It takes the stress out of having to leave them at home or with someone they don't know well."

iii. Changes in confidence in parenting

Increases in overall parenting confidence seem to be an underlying theme in most of the feedback from participants. The main source of this increased confidence seems to have been the one on one family support visits and group workshops; particular mention is made of the themes of self awareness, communication and parenting courses. Some parents also remarked that learning to ask for and accepting help and participating in Playgroup was very valuable for them. As a result, many parents have improved their own and their families situations.

Many parents have really had to work hard to 'hang in' with participation. Playgroup presents a situation where the dynamics are challenging for new parents especially as many are feeling vulnerable and isolated when they join the program. For example, Joanne said, "I was not coping. I felt isolated and disconnected. At the time I was suffering Post Natal Depression and just cried all the time. I had no family in Australia. My pregnancy was unexpected and I had not planned to be a parent. I attended antenatal classes but people told me you will know what to do ... I didn't!" However, she joined the Nambour Good Beginnings program and persisted and finally she said, "I found my circle of friends". Another mother also expressed the fortitude it takes to keep going when she said, "I have attended Playgroup approximately ten times over a year. I tend to isolate myself but I make myself come to 'get out of the house'. However I feel I don't fit in and can't talk to people. I sometimes feel I am being judged. I will keep coming because, as my youngest child gets older, it will be good interaction for her." Yet another mother (name withheld) said it helped normalise her experience, "Playgroup helped me to talk to other Mothers and to get some advice and help over a cup of coffee. When talking to them I would find out they were experiencing similar issues."

iv. Changes in family functioning

Family functioning was broadly reported to have improved by a combination of factors pertaining to various elements of the family support service at Nambour Good Beginnings. Many participants reported feeling empowered and 'having the lights turned on' through the communication and parenting courses and suddenly being able to understand their child's world view, "to see through their child's eyes", as parent Nadine put it, thus gaining insight into effective communication with their children.

Volunteer Community Parents seem to also make a major difference to some families. Having someone coming into their home and listening, sharing the load, talking with the children and modelling skills, parents were able to access support even if they didn't have a car to travel to services. For example, Connie said, "The volunteer helped me manage to keep going. The challenges I was facing were the DV situation as well as my son with mild Aspergers and ADHD. He had special needs. He was really 'full on' and would act out violently sometimes and the volunteer helped me manage to keep going. She (the Volunteer Community Parent) would spend time with the kids and give me a bit of 'time out', time to think in the garden. I have very little family support as my father has been unwell for many years and require a lot of care. I didn't want to add to their burdens, so I was quite alone. Anyway, it has all worked out ... My son is now getting straight A's at school".

Some parents have reported being able to get on with their lives and having their dreams come true, such as Tanya, who said, “We have had Hizayer diagnosed with major intolerance to foods and a leaky gut. He is now not as sick and is growing slowly whilst sticking to a strict diet. Haywin has found that he fits into Nambour High School and no longer gets teased by children as he is smart. Harlon has gone from ‘D’s’ and ‘C’s’ at school to being diagnosed with ADHD to straight ‘A’s’ and achieving well both at school and at home whilst playing violin and learning to control his anger. Harmonie, too, is in the process for ADHD.... we are improving our lives”.

Several parents thought that changes in themselves, such as increased confidence, self esteem and communication skills also required adjustments in couple relationships. As another parent said, “I completed a course on ‘communication/self esteem’ and I felt it helped me to see what I was putting up with at home. The course made me more assertive. My husband did not like this and told me ...‘you have changed’”. Integrating changes in the family dynamic is another important aspect of the change process for each family.

Also having a male Volunteer Community Parent was reported by one participant as being particularly helpful for her husband. Sharon said, “We have had a few volunteers over the years because sometimes they have to leave for other commitments. We had a couple of male volunteers who came in once. This was great for my husband as he had a male to talk to.”

v. Changes in parents’ and children’s social connections and support

Throughout the stories there is much evidence of the positive changes in parents’ and children’s social connections and support. Considering that the vast majority of people accessing the program are isolated at the time they join, this is an excellent outcome.

Nancy, expressed her appreciation for the friendship and support through the good and bad times. She said, “The volunteer at Playgroup is so beautiful. We bonded through Playgroup and she became part of my support network. She has a special bond with my son. I still see her when we come to Nambour. She’s someone who’s really touched my life. ... When my middle son was 18 months old we discovered that he needed to have a skull reconstruction. So when he was 2 years and 4 months old he had to undergo major surgery. I felt like the world was crumbling ... and there were also business issues and family of origin issues going on at the same time. Everyone at Good Beginnings was there for me... the mums, the workers the volunteers.”

Another parent noted how friendships have endured over time and distance, Nancy said, “Playgroup has been my main involvement. But felt like all the staff and the mums were part of an extended support network. Many of the friendship have endured over time and distance”. Pam also took a supportive relationship made at the parenting course forward (now her children are at school), she said, “The group structure has also linked me up with two ladies at my school. These ladies also participated in the parenting course. When I saw them I approached them and we made the connection with how we knew each other from the P5 course. I have spoken to them about the course. We now talk about ‘different ways to parent’ and talk about issues that may be occurring with our children. “

Louise has 18 month old twins as well as another small child and finds life at home isolating and very stressful, she said, “When I get to Playgroup I instantly feel better as I can relax and unwind. What’s been the most significant change for me has been the opportunity to socialise, that is, having

people, adults I mean, to have a conversation with that doesn't include the word '... Why'. When I get to Playgroup I instantly feel better as I can relax and unwind. Being around other adults is really important for me. I can share my thoughts and feelings. I can also share my experiences of parenting and swap stories with other parents. It helps me understand and normalise my children's behaviour... it makes me more confident as a parent. Having coffee and talking with other Mum's is really helpful and important to me."

Children also get the opportunity to learn to socialise with other children. Louise said that her child has improved confidence, "By exposing her to other children of different ages, she finds it a lot easier to 'stand up for herself'. He seems to have developed a better understanding of how children of different ages act ... she has improved confidence." Tanya has an only child and was excited about the way that her daughter has come out of herself, she said, "My daughter has really come out of herself since she's been coming to Playgroup. In some ways she's now a bit (bossy)... but also she shares more with the other children. She just loves coming to the Playgroup." Also the role of Volunteer Community Parents can really make a difference in helping particularly vulnerable children accept other people. Another parent said, "The children use to cry when the Volunteer Community Parent looked at them and when she helped me bath them they would scream all the time. They are good now, they spend time playing with the Volunteer Community Parent and have accepted her into the house. They are learning to share Mum."

However, the Playgroup structure does not always work for all parents and children. The dynamics parent-to-parent, parent-to-child and child-to-child are complex and things do not always work well from each parent's perspective. Some children have special needs as well. Sharon said, "My son became friends with another boy. I remember when my son and the other boy were playing in the tent with a tunnel. They were both lying down next to each other in the tent and laughing together. It wasn't at anything in particular... they were just laughing together. It was so sweet to see. Unfortunately, there was an instance in which my son took a drum off another child who was playing with it. Then his Mum got offended and spoke to my son abruptly and about him taking the drum and told him to give it back to her. This was a bit upsetting. Another thing my son used to do was open and close the sliding door to the outside play area continuously, which was posing a safety risk to other children who were going through the door. After these events I was not confident about attending Playgroup. My son didn't know how to properly interact with the other children. He had speech difficulties and at times would hit out at other kids. At two years and seven months my son was diagnosed with Autism. If people were more understanding of Autism and what children with Autism may do at times and that they are not being malicious or intentional in any way I would have continued attending Playgroup. However, three years later we caught up with the boy my son was friends with in Playgroup... that was good."

The model of service delivery – parents' reflections

The parents who participated in the evaluation were involved in various aspects of the program and many were involved in several service modalities simultaneously. Of the 14 parents who participated:

- Over half were part of the Playgroup (eight out of 14)

- Over 30 percent of the parents in the evaluation exercise (five of 14) had attended a group work course, either the communication courses (AAA – Assertive, Alive, Aware and Me, Myself, I) or parenting courses (P5 and Parent Effectiveness Training)
- Five of the 14 had volunteers coming into their homes regularly to provide support
- Six of the 14 had or were still having regular one on one Family Support sessions with the Family Support workers (Belinda and Anna).

Most of the group expressed approval of the combination of services. One parent said “The combination (one on one family support sessions, parenting courses and Playgroup) has really worked well for me”.

One participant noted that she was involved with just about everything that she could be both in the Nambour Good Beginnings Program as well as at the Community Centre, she said, “I was involved with Good Beginnings for six years. I have been involved with just about everything at the NCC including counselling, the AAA course, Me, Myself, I course, the parenting course, Playgroup and other NCC functions”. Whilst others just attended Playgroup or had a Volunteer Community Parent. Most participants were, however, utilising two or three (of four) service modalities throughout their involvement with Nambour Good Beginnings.

Some of the participants noted that some of the service modalities worked better for them than others for a variety of reasons. The reasons ranged from lack of transport to having children with different needs that were not specifically catered for in the program. The later was most notable in the cases of some parents with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The parenting and communication courses offered by the program are reported as leading to many participants having the experience of suddenly understand their child perspective - ‘having the lights turned on to what makes their children tick’. They also reported understanding the importance of their own self esteem, sense of personal value and self confidence. Many participants enrol in these classes year after year, finding new dimensions every time they do the course. One parent noted that “The Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) Course has worked best in improving my relationships with my kids. I now have the skills to work through problems with my kids and I know other ways to do things. I no longer feel guilty... I feel incredibly blessed.’ However, one participant said that her family situation and needs were not fully addressed in the courses, she said, “My husband started attending a parenting course but did not complete it. We felt it would work great for parent whose children don’t have a disability. Although we could try and use some of the techniques with our children we need a more specialised parenting course for our boys with ASD.”

Many participants highly valued the one on one family support sessions with the Family Support Workers. For example, one participant reflected on her session with the Family Support Worker this way, “Anna has visited me at home a few times. She can answer questions that I have and provide me with support to manage the stress I experience.” Another said, “Having Belinda and Anna visiting me and also connecting me up with other services (is helpful).”

The Volunteer Community Parents doing weekly home visiting has been most significant for many parents who do not have transport, have children with particular needs that need to be addressed in the home environment and others that need ‘another pairs of hands, ears or hearts’ to help the family function better. One participant reflected on the challenge to make a stronger bond with her

child, she said, “The Volunteer home visiting service has worked best for me. I have a volunteer, named Heidi, who comes to my house every Tuesday... since November last year. My second daughter Sephra is a very sick child and takes up most of my time. ... Jassy and I don’t have a very good bond ...The children use to cry (at first) when Heidi looked at them... They are good now, they spend time playing with Heidi and have accepted her into the house.”

The area where there is the greatest divergence of positive and negative experience is in parents’ experiences of the supported Playgroup. Several parents have requested that more Playgroup sessions be made available to parents in the program. Many parents found Playgroup to be ‘the best thing that had happened to them’ since having a child because it providing them with:

- Much needed socialisation
- Opportunity to normalise their experiences of parenting
- Opportunity to experience mutual support – supporting each other and pick up tips on parenting
- Knowledge and skill development – role modelling from workers and other mothers and opportunity to discuss their experiences of putting new skills into practice at home
- Opportunity to find out about information and services to support them and their children.

However, several parents (about a quarter of the sample) reported that the Playgroup experience was not a positive one for a variety of reason. Several parents commented that Playgroup was not as helpful as other service modalities because they felt that their child was different, especially where there was a child with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (diagnosed or undiagnosed, at the time). There were a variety of other reasons as well including:

- Feeling left out of the group – perceiving cliques between some parents
- Feeling no common ground with parents
- Experiencing high levels of anxiety whilst at playgroup
- Not approving of what was going on at the playgroup sessions between parents or between parents and children
- Lack of hygiene standards of shared toys and resources.

The Model of Service – volunteers experiences and perspectives

Trained volunteers play a vital role as Volunteer Community Parents in the Nambour Good Beginnings’ service delivery model. There are currently 21 volunteers (most are not professional people but all have been parents) who are trained through the program and work under supervision of the Senior Family Support Workers to support parents and children. Some volunteers are involved in the Playgroup but most provide support through weekly home visiting with families.

Five volunteers participated in the evaluation project sharing their stories about why and how they got involved with Nambour Good Beginnings and the significant changes for them on the journey. Their stories are available at Appendix A.

The volunteers all had their individual reasons for getting involved in the program, however there were some common threads running through their stories. Many had a history of volunteering and articulated that being involved in the community creates healthier communities for everyone. As one volunteer said, "I like the idea of volunteering and community work – it is very important for creating healthy communities." Another said "When I returned to Australia I returned with goals of being able to make my community a better place". Most were not working full time and many had retired creating space to get involved, as one said, "All of a sudden you have time for yourself and time to provide a little support to others."

Another volunteer expressed her reasons for getting involved as being because she felt empathy for parents of young children, she said "I joined to help families but found I was more suited to working with the children", she added, "... we all need to recognise the innocence, wonder, wisdom and worth of all children." Other volunteers recognised the importance of the specific type of support that Nambour Good Beginnings offers young families, such as the need for role modelling of functional parenting. One volunteer said, "I discovered how important this level of support is for families (in my previous family support work)." Another said, "I knew what it's like to have twins with no family support available."

Many volunteers were living away from their grandchildren and were looking for regular contact with a young family. One volunteer said, "I am a grandmother of 12 but none live close to me". Another saw the need to have a grandparent figure involved in the family, she said, "I see great value in families having grandparents around and I enjoy working with parents to provide that role model." Another said, "A grandparent sees things a bit differently from parents – I think a grandparent's perspective is valuable for the grandchildren as well as their parents."

In terms of significant changes for volunteers resulting from their involvement in Nambour Good Beginnings, several recognised their own 'need to be needed' and to feel respected and appreciated as being a significant change in the lives. One volunteer said, "Mothers say to me 'You don't know what you do for me?' Families have appreciated me. What they don't understand is what they give back to me." Another volunteer was very touched by the respect that her family treats her with, she said, "The family are really respectful towards me ... They don't ask me lots of questions about my personal situation and I am careful not to be intrusive towards them as well. I let them take the lead and I just go along with the flow. It's a nice feeling to be accepted just as I am and for me to accept them ... just as they are."

Some volunteers mentioned coming to understand the limits to their role in supporting families. One said, "Another significant change for me was the realisation that I can't fix families problems. I have learnt to take on a role in which I 'walk along side' them. I understand their needs are changing constantly so I allow them to decide what is needed. It may just be "having a cuppa" or it may entail some sort of practical help. This may include playing with the children, going to the park or going shopping." Another said, "As with all things, I am just a stepping stone, when I am no longer needed I move on and so do the families I work with."

Many reflected on the fun that they share with the families and children they work with. One volunteer said, "(I appreciate) the ability to have simple fun as a family and a lot more laughter in the households. As my child often accompanies me I have also noticed that the behaviour of the children in these families' changes and their play becomes less complicated and their personal skill in their dealings with each other improves. Any problems in (family) interactions lessen and the mothers also relax instead of waiting for conflict." The Playgroup volunteer also confirmed this view that "... more fun is necessary in life".

Many volunteers appreciate feeling like a part of the team and said that being part of the program as a two way street. One said, "The co-ordinators of the Good Beginnings Program provide great support to me and I feel valued as a volunteer. They connect me with families in which mothers are looking for a mother figure." Another volunteer expressed her appreciation for the support she now feels, she said, "I have felt more supported by my community and have improved my education through being a volunteer with Nambour Good Beginnings. I have attended training sessions and meetings, attended Playgroup and built lasting friendships." Keeping informed and debriefing with the Coordinator is an important part of the model and experience for volunteers. One explained it this way, "Nambour Good Beginnings provided me with ease of access to information, advice and referrals for the families I worked with. I could often debrief with one of the coordinators and if I had concerns about any issues I knew I had unbiased ears to listen. If I felt a family needed more support than I could provide my coordinators would assist in gaining any extra support required."

An integral part of being involved as a volunteer is completing the training program including group work course in communication and parenting skills. A new volunteer who has just completed her training and is yet to be assigned a family, found the training experience enlightening, she said, "Sometimes you think you know yourself pretty well, but the course has given me another slant on myself and others." She added, "I wasn't (previously) as aware as I am now. I wouldn't have thought before I spoke and I might have offered my opinion too quickly. The course has given me all I need to know to embark on this new voluntary role of Volunteer Community Parent."

The Model of Service - staff reflections

Both Family Support Workers were asked as part of the evaluation process to reflect on the program and the way they work with families.

The Coordinator and Senior Family Support Worker, Belinda, recorded the following reflections on the effectiveness of the various service modalities and their mix.

"Family support home visiting sessions works well most of the time. The home visiting gives the parents a chance relax in their own environment, no problems getting children in and out of vehicles. Generally speaking it will become an event that many parents look forward to as the time is focused upon either the children or themselves. I enjoy it as it gives me some additional insight to the family and how they function in their own environment. For the same reason it can provide significant opportunity to capture information that may be contributing to conflict or issues within the family (TV, food etc). However, family support

through home visiting can be problematic when parents forget. It is time consuming with regards to travel and writing up notes etc.

Play Group has the enormous potential to provide role modelling for parents and children. It is an opportunity for children to develop socially, physically and emotionally. This can also be an area where conflict arises and relationships can be damaged. Personally I feel there needs to be a clear demarcation between social networking for parents and Playgroup activities.

Group work is an area that seems to have wide spread appeal to parents and participants in general. I have found conducting training has without exception had significant positive outcomes for parents. I have a very strong belief that communication training should underpin/precede any other course work. The feedback I have had over the years doing training here at Good Beginnings is that communication skills development influences how parents relate to their partners, their children and additionally value adds and supports subsequent parenting courses.

Volunteer Community Parents have more often than not a mutually reciprocal positive experience working with families. I still feel this is a terrific aspect of our program. It is often times difficult to manage this valuable asset as time is limited. I enjoy working with volunteers as they often provide me with great inspiration and they are not professional people so they come unencumbered with 'how to do' agenda. Most times a deep companionate relationship develops between the Volunteer Community Parents and the families."

The other Family Support Worker, Anna, reflected on an experience that highlighted the need, which arises often, to 'start where the parent is at' supporting parents to deal with the basic issues of safety and security to establish a base from which to move onto the specific parenting and family function issues.

"When we initially link with a family we listen to the individual's story and encourage them by asking certain questions that will help us develop a larger picture. We also ask what it is they are hoping to gain from being with the GB program.

We primarily work with strength based solution focused. We believe the family has strengths that we encourage the individual to recognise and build on. However, they are not going to be interested in recognising strengths if they are in jeopardy of becoming homeless. Here we first need to assess their basic needs this being- 'Maslow's hierarchy of needs' of food, shelter and clothing. The next step of need is safety, protection and security followed by love and belonging before we get to self esteem so there may be quite a way to go to work with a family before we assist them with other needs. It is also important to be aware of sustainability.

For instance, a Mum I had been working with and was about to close came into the main office looking for help. She and her partner were embroiled in a fight the night before where he became abusive and it got nasty. The front office had followed protocol and contacted DV Connect. This is a number to assist women affected by DV to be relocated for

safety purposes. After talking with her for some time I assessed her safety and recognised that there was minimal risk to her and her children as the argument although violent and not to be underestimated really just got out of control. In other words her partner is not normally a physically abusive person. She said they argued over finances.

DV Connect wanted this Mum to be relocated with her children but when talking to her she said they had just signed a six month lease and were three weeks in arrears with the rent. As well she has a good job close by, a day care for her young son that she was very happy with and her older son had just started work experience through school. If she were to leave and be relocated she would lose all of that and still be responsible for a huge debt. Also after discussing the relationship with my client she said they hadn't slept together for quite some time and they pay rent independently. So in reality there is no relationship apart from living under the same roof.

The police were called to the couple's house the night before and issued a standard Domestic Violence Protection order on the partner so she was fairly safe of further abuse. She said she felt safe staying there. She said she wanted out of the house but could not afford to move as she would not be able to afford accommodation on her own. Centrelink have her down as a couple so she wasn't entitled to parenting payment. He works full time but contributed very minimal not even enough to cover his expenses.

Although there were a whole range of issues that presented the main issue was:

- To stabilise and become financially independent from her ex partner
- Pay off the debt
- Save up for a car if possible (she was offered to buy her bosses car for a good price)
- Plan to move by the end of the lease.

When talking with KEIHS earlier (Keys to Early Intervention in Homelessness Service) I discovered that Centrelink now allow for Single Parenting Payment for a parent who is living under the same roof with a previous partner. We contacted Centrelink and arranged the independent single parenting payment through an interview. I then linked this client with KEIHS who was able to support her with the rent arrears payment and some other debts. They are also assisting her with other financial issues.

This client is now independent financially and is able to move forward to work on other goals to improve her families' lives these include:

- Self esteem
- Parenting
- Getting dental treatment
- Drug and alcohol rehabilitation

When working with families I see it as a privilege and always feel humbled and honoured to be invited into their lives."

Finally the NCC Coordinator, Mark offered a reflection on his experiences over the past couple of years as he learned about the Family Support Program and become more involved.

“When I first began working at NCC in January 2007 the first thing that struck me was how Nambour Good Beginnings was considered to be almost a separate organisation to NCC. The type of work that was being done by the program was a bit more direct and had a case management aspect to it so I sort of assumed that this must have been the reason for that, i.e. the two were kept apart because they do different types of work. However for an organisation that is fairly small to then split it apart again into two did seem unusual. It turned out that quite a bit of organisational and personnel change had occurred at NCC and Nambour Good Beginnings over the 12 months or so before I began working here and it did seem like people wanted a rest from that, they were looking for some consistency so I went with it for a while.

Similarly, for the first few months I was gathering my feet in the Coordinator role, so the fact that Nambour Good Beginnings and NCC behaved separately temporarily suited me as I felt like I had my hands full working out how everything else worked but I was still a little uneasy that things went on separately. But from the kind of feedback that I seemed to be getting from the workers it had always been this way and they seemed fine for it to continue this way. I have never quite got to the historical bottom of how it came to be this way and now days it doesn't really matter.

The other initial observation I had was the reputation that Kathryn cast over the program and the workers. Without exaggerating it did seem like she was mythologised. My third observation was that I really loved the fact that parents and kids were coming and going through the centre, to Playgroup, for individual chats, too group work etc and I thought that this was wonderful. For me as a new person I thought the program had a real sense of energy and participation and involvement. Moreover knowing that all this “behind the scene” work went on with volunteers who were matched with parents was also wonderful. I certainly felt that Nambour Good Beginnings was a powerful engine room for a whole bunch of family work and felt like it had a high level of family involvement and interaction and must have been doing something right by the sheer level of participant numbers.

From a staff point of view, I thought that the program had a really good mix of personalities that complimented one another really well. The extroverted fast talking Belinda (Coordinator) and the considered lower key Anna (Family Support Worker). Both chock full of passion for their job and believing in families and children. In addition the fantastic bank of volunteers including Sharone, and Gemma as the administration person who shortly changed to Petra (Administration) all looked like a great team. Moreover through observations and the occasional brief chat's I'd have with participants the work being done seemed to be building and supporting people really well.

As time went on I came to realise that not having worked closely with a family support program meant that I was a bit deficient in knowledge around how the actual program ran so for the first few months I felt like I was doing a lot of listening and questioning of the workers to try and get an handle on things. But they were very accommodating of me and over time a few things sunk in.

As time moved on I kept hearing really good stories from stakeholders and other workers about the work of Nambour Good Beginnings. This validated to me that things were on the right track.

There did seem to be some complexity around managing all the services that were delivered from Nambour Good Beginnings, the sheer number of services that Nambour Good Beginnings was involved in and the amount of work that went into them all meant that things at times seemed a little chaotic and in danger of running of the tracks. It was wonderful that Nambour Good Beginnings was so productive but I was a little worried about the sustainability of it all, so the first real arrangement that we came too was that Belinda as Coordinator would look after the 'operational' stuff and I'd look after the contract & dept management stuff and support as much as possible with the report work. Early on Nambour Good Beginnings had a contract with FACSHIA to do work at Kenilworth and the reporting requirements for this funding where the most onerous I had ever seen. The other element in the mix was the arrangement with GBA which when I first started seemed like a fairly lopsided arrangement that was also sucking time out of Nambour Good Beginnings. Managing this relationship seemed to bring a bit of stress to staff also. Historically it seemed like the links with GBA had been a lot closer in the past but now they were just an additional burden on Nambour Good Beginnings. Additionally GBA themselves seemed to be going through some large changes with personal changes so that became an opportunity for us to back off a bit from them and concentrate more on what we were doing. Our Federal and State funder's seemed fairly happy with the outputs that the program was achieving however I was overall disappointed with how disengaged they were with 'their' programs. I realise now they just want things to run smoothly with good numbers and no real surprises and they are happy. It is pure contract management nothing more.

After a year or so of working in the role of Centre Coordinator and having gained some confidence with knowing a bit about Nambour Good Beginnings and its staff I thought it would be useful to try and build some structure around the program so that we were not managing the work and what it through up on a case by case basis. It seemed that around this time participant requests and enquiries were coming in for the individual family support workers to do a variety of roles, some of which were outside the scope of the program. So over a period of time we developed some documents like the participant's rights and responsibilities, referral guiding document, etc. that attempted to scope out the boundaries of the program as well as systematise and support some of the work. With hindsight I realise now that what I was trying to do with this was get some processes in place to 'manage' and provide guidance through those chaotic patches.

Through 2009 Belinda and I talked a bit around reliving more of the 'coordinating' aspects from her role so that she could concentrate on practice where she really thrived and kicked plenty of goals. So with Petra on board she gradually moved into the data collection and collation role which then moved into preparing most of the reports that we needed to write for funding bodies. We developed documents like the 'programs and activity delegation document' which went back and forth a bit and become active in early 2010.

Through the second half of 2009 the work in Kenilworth was externally evaluated and this was another sign that Nambour Good Beginnings was doing some really positive and strong work. The evaluation revealed some stuff slightly different to what we had expected to come up, a higher emphasis placed on social connectedness and maybe a little less on the direct parenting side of things. After the positivity of this evaluation I felt like it would be useful to take the next step and take an external look at the work that occurred from Nambour.”

Service Delivery Model - reflections from stakeholders.

The Nambour Good Beginnings program has an Reference group structure (also known as the Advisory group which draws stakeholders together including family and child agencies from government, non-government agencies, voluntary community associations and the private sector (child care centres). The meetings are largely information sharing which facilitate knowledge across the sectors as well as promoting effective working relationships and referral process between agencies.

Members of this group were advised of the evaluation project at one of their meetings and were invited to participate via a survey, including the opportunity to tell a story from their experience. However, only four agencies responded (from the 12 surveys that were circulated). None took up the ‘story’ option. One respondent was new to the network and felt unable to provide much feedback but noted, like all respondents, that the Advisory Group meetings were a great opportunity to meet other service providers, share information and network. One respondent said, “... attendance at regularly held meetings facilitated by Good Beginnings Coordinator where other agencies share information on their services ... (is)...very beneficial in raising awareness of community resources.”

Although there was a low survey return rate some useful feedback was provided. Overall feedback on the service delivery modalities was positive from the two respondents most familiar with the program. One respondent identified the family support service; volunteers doing home visiting; information and /or referral and linking with other services as most valuable whilst the other identified the parenting courses such as P5 and AAA (Aware Assertive Alive etc) as well as information and referral and linking with other services.

The Sunshine Coast Multiple Births Association (SCMBA) expressed appreciation for the support Nambour Good Beginnings offers multiple birth families. The respondent said, “Half a dozen families who are members of SCMBA are known to have used the service. Where they have bonded with their community parent, the weekly visits have increased the mum’s confidence in caring for newborns – such that some may have dependence on the community Parent’s weekly visit (something that cannot always be guaranteed with volunteers). Many mums feel they have to do it alone and do not want strangers in their home. SCMBA advocates that any families with multiples seek any help on offer. Many do not unless issues arise with depression ...”

The SCMBA explained the value of Nambour Good Beginnings to multiple birth families, “The services provided by Good Beginnings are invaluable and it is a comfort for groups such as SCMBA to

know that if a multiple birth family is in crisis because they feel overwhelmed with newborn twins/triplets, they have no family or friends on the coast available to help, they have a large family and twins have pushed them toward a tipping-point, etc, that when they contact us, we can direct them toward this service. As parents of multiples we try to give tips, advices, pop in for home visits, cook a meal, arrange a referral, but our capacity is very much to provide social events and newsletters that allow multiple birth families to network/buddy and grow their confidence through their own self-help endeavours. We have no resources or training to provide in-home help/care.”

Child Health nurses and Nambour Good Beginnings staff make direct and indirect referrals between their services for families who may potentially benefit from either service. The Child Health nurse commented on the complementarity with their service, “We refer people to Nambour Good Beginnings because it provides additional support that our service cannot provide. Also I am aware that Belinda and Anna have better knowledge of services beyond their own (for families to)... access.”

The Child Health nurse also commented on changes in families she knew who are involved in Nambour Good Beginnings, she said, “I have had families express their confidence in parenting improvements through either the engagement of Anna and or Belinda in counselling with them and or attending the parenting courses and or the Playgroup.” She added, “I feel Nambour Good Beginnings bridges a gap for our mutual clients who seem to be a little on the fringe in that they don’t, for whatever reason, fit the conventional client who mostly attends our groups but who we may home visit but benefits from the one on one and slower introduction to the Playgroups that Nambour Good Beginnings provides.”

The two child care centre respondents noted that it is good to be able to refer families to Nambour Good Beginnings especially as they have noticed more families at their Centres who need support. However, one respondent reflected that they are not always able to receive referrals/place children from families in the Nambour Good Beginnings in the Centre, for example, when there are excessive overdue accounts.

Stakeholders were also asked to make suggestions for changes to Nambour Good Beginnings program. Most stakeholders confirmed the functionality of the current model and made no suggestions. SCMBA expressed interest in taking their association with Nambour Good Beginnings further. The respondent said, “SCMBA would love to partner with Good Beginnings to better explain the possible needs/issues of multiple birth families on the Coast to allow Good Beginnings to review its programs – as SCMBA is run by and for multiple birth families; volunteers have limited opportunities to link up with support programs on the Coast.”

The only issue SCMBA identified was one anecdotal report of the facility not getting along with a Volunteer Community Parent.

Looking to the future

A staff workshop was held following the process of gathering, sharing and prioritising participant stories at the Family BBQ and a session of the Nambour Playgroup (second stage on MSC methodology). At the workshop, staff reflected on the feedback about NGB and the model that was being used. The NCC Coordinator noted that he found the discussion of the service model most helpful, providing him with deeper understanding of the elements of the model and framework which built his knowledge as well as trust in the service delivery effort and enthusiasm for the service. The following general points were noted by staff in response to the participant stories.

- The program is providing a 'safety net', wrapping around families and gently challenging them to make changes and try new experiences
- The various modalities of the family support services complement each other well providing participants with a good mix of services
- The range of services gives people space to move around the program
- Clients/families may get the most benefit from an area least expected by the worker, for example in this evaluation some people have reported in their story that they really value Playgroup while prior to this process occurring there was no indication that they regarded it in this way.
- People seem to be transitioning through the program when they are ready.

Some areas of concern with the service that were noted from the parents' feedback included:

- The workers need to be very conscious of the potential for participants to develop a relationship of dependence on staff and volunteers
- It is important to transition families out of the program to make space for others as well as help them to 'move on' into the community
- The Playgroup needs review on the basis that that some of the purposes may be getting lost due to lack of resources. Concerns included:
 - Playgroup is intended to be a 'specialist playgroup' as many parents are learning to socialise with other people/parents. Also to support parents who are learning to play with and communicate with their child(ren)
 - The dynamics are often difficult and some parents are ready/needing to move on
 - Too many people are feeling excluded. Workers need to be on the lookout for the contraction of parents – numbers wise as well as personally (psychologically).

Staff ideas on program aspects for review or change

The staff identified a number of areas where there could be further consideration or future review and development.

Potential Action Area 1: Introduce regular monitoring and feedback from participants

- Check in with participants periodically to see what is working best for them, being mindful of 'where the client is at' at the time phase and their capacity
- Explore using 'Most Significant Change' Method as a regular 'check in' method with participants.

Potential Action Area 2: Playgroup

- Another Playgroup day should be explored
- A dedicated children's worker would be highly desirable to increase effectiveness of Playgroup
- 'Guidelines' for Playgroup should be developed in consultation with parents and volunteers – addressing questions around clarifying the purpose of Playgroup as a specialist focus on children or more general focus on parents
- More support for families to exit from Playgroup as appropriate.

Potential Action Area 3: Bridge for families to community involvement

- Explore opportunities to build bridges between families ready to leave Nambour Good Beginnings in order that they can transition to other social connections and opportunities to continue to participate in their community.
- Explore, in consultation with parents, ways to facilitate families smoothly moving back and forth between Nambour Good Beginnings and other NCC activities, e.g. parents becoming involved in activities such as cooking groups, yoga or developing their own activity groups.

Potential Action Area 4: Funding for a couple of extra people to share the load

- Explore additional funding to support employment of child minding worker - the role being to lead Playgroup, to plan activities for children as well as some facilitation with parents
- Explore more resources for Program Coordinator role to restore position to full time without taking resources from family support and group work/training etc.
- Better define the role of Coordinator (program administration)
- More resources and staff support in casework e.g. the opportunity to do 'double worker' visits occasionally if required; time/resources for case review; opportunity and time/resources for training in mental health and disability.

Conclusion

The participation of parents, volunteers, stakeholders and staff in this evaluation process - where stories were told, shared and reflected on collectively - has provided fertile material for evaluation. It has also provided staff with 'first hand' information which has assisted them to reflect on and further consult about the future directions of the Nambour Good Beginnings. To a large extent the learning's from the evaluation have validated the strengths of the model, particularly the use of a variety of modalities and flexible way that participants can move between them.

The full text versions of the participants' stories are most insightful. They reveal the challenges that the parents have faced and the significant changes that many of these courageous parents have wrought in their lives with the support of the Nambour Good Beginnings.

The evidence of significant change for families, as a result of being involved in the program, reflects positively on the strengths of their flexible, 'wrap around the family', community based service delivery model. It also is a testament to the skills and commitment of the staff and Nambour

Community Centre. All in all, it provides extensive evidence of the positive outcomes from the collaborative investment of resources made by the State and Federal Governments.