



creating capable communities
TOOLKIT GUIDE





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What is the Creating Capable Communities Toolkit Guide?

Do you work with families and neighbourhoods to improve the safety and wellbeing of children?

Family Life does, through its whole-of-community approach.

Family Life's Creating Capable Communities program strengthens families and neighbourhoods. This is achieved by integrating Family Support and community outreach efforts to high-need neighborhoods and vulnerable groups.

This Guide provides an overview and the framework of the Creating Capable Communities program.

The framework can be adapted for other communities. By sharing how the Creating Capable Communities program was developed and run, other communities can apply the principles to achieve positive results for families and children.

The Guide also provides a complete sample activity for 'Creating Capable Leaders', one of Family Life's Creating Capable Communities activities.

Comprehensive information about the Creating Capable Communities program is available in the Creating Capable Communities Toolkit. www.familylife.com.au



Who is Family Life?

Family Life's innovative, high-impact, integrated services strengthen communities, support families and help children to thrive.

Founded in 1970, Family Life is a non profit and non denominational community agency with 90 staff and 300 volunteers.

Family Life works in high-need communities, across seven local government areas in the southern suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Family Life's whole-of-community approach utilises three strategies to promote and achieve its primary goal - the wellbeing of children.

1. Responding to need

Services such as counselling, mediation, dispute resolution, family violence groups, family relationship services, parenting education and community development are central to Family Life's response to community needs.

2. Innovative social change programs such as:

Creating Capable Communities – preventing social isolation.

Family Life helps isolated people living in high-need neighbourhoods to develop relationships, skills and a sense of community and belonging.

YouthWorx and PeopleWorx - preventing youth and adult unemployment.

Through our social enterprises, Family Life helps vulnerable unemployed people to gain work experience, retail training, personal support and a pathway to employment.

SHINE - preventing mental health problems

Family Life's mental health program for children aged 8-13 helps children who are showing early signs of a mental health problem to develop resilience and strategies for coping.

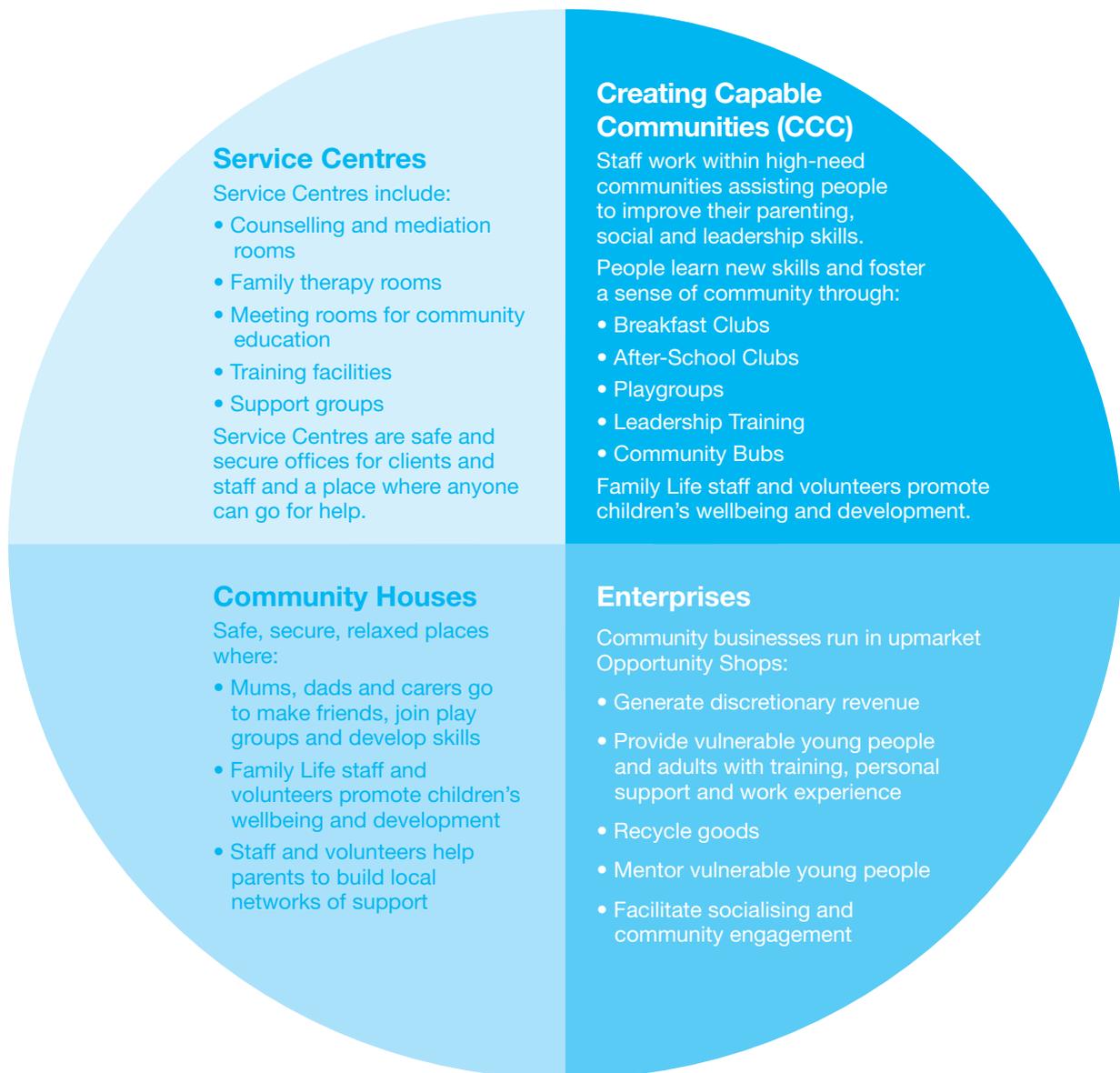
3. Promoting wellbeing by sharing evidence, practice and knowledge including:

Membership of peak bodies, national and international presentations, documentation of efforts and advocacy for child, family and community wellbeing.

The Family Life Integrated Services Model

The integrated model:

- Strengthens and supports families, helping to prevent family problems and breakdown
- Enables people to become active participating members of the community
- Links family support intervention with prevention and sustainable change



What is Creating Capable Communities?

Creating Capable Communities is a community strengthening program, made possible thanks to funding from diverse sources including the Australian Government through the Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

It was developed by Family Life in 1998, in partnership with the residents of high-need neighbourhoods in the southern suburbs of Melbourne.

These neighbourhoods are located in suburbs where Family Life is funded by government to provide family support services.

Family Life's experience demonstrates that to promote the wellbeing of children, interventions must strengthen families and the local network of support in the neighbourhood. This requires a focus on the broader community and the collective effort of community members to look after the wellbeing of all. Everyone's involvement increases the likelihood of ongoing sustained change.

The families living in these areas experience many additional life challenges such as social isolation, financial disadvantage, mental health issues, violence, alcohol and drug use and other factors which may affect health, quality of life and the ability to participate in community life. These factors pose risks to the development of the children and are highly correlated with potential for statutory child protection involvement. This has been well established by research and population studies.

"While many Australian children and adolescents are faring well, some experience considerably worse health, poorer developmental and learning outcomes and generally reduced wellbeing... Children and young people living in... socio economically disadvantaged areas also have worse health and education outcomes".

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. 'Making Progress: the health development and well-being of Australia's children and young people'. Cat no PHE 104 Canberra AIHW pp. 2.

Creating Capable Communities developed as a Family Life innovation to assist families in these neighbourhoods to overcome the personal and social barriers associated with economic disadvantage.

The program evolved from focusing on the strengths and resources of families and neighbourhoods, and working together to empower residents to change the context in which they live. By encouraging ownership and responsibility for addressing their personal and community needs, Family Life staff and volunteers have worked with residents to build their confidence and capacity to create sustainable change.

The integrated philosophy of a strengths-based empowerment approach places at the centre of the helping process a focus on “...*the strengths and resources of people and their environments, rather than their problems and pathologies*”. (Chapin 1995:506).



Creating Capable Communities – Goals

- Strengthen families by developing support networks in the local neighbourhoods
- Improve children's and parents' health and wellbeing

Partnership with families is a core principle which has driven the success of the Creating Capable Communities program.

Creating Capable Communities engages and involves residents and parents in activities and projects gradually building from participation to volunteering, to local leadership and employment.

It is this local leadership which provides the foundation for sustainable change and improved wellbeing for children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

A core group of activities provides the opportunities for interaction, learning skills, developing support networks and pathways to community participation – all leading to social and economic inclusion.

This change takes time.

The effectiveness of the program over time is now supported by an evidence-base of intergenerational improvements in the lives of parents and children participating in Creating Capable Communities.¹



¹ See Creating Capable Communities – celebrating a journey for the stories of the children and parents involved.

What is the Creating Capable Communities Toolkit?

The Creating Capable Communities Toolkit is a 'how to' manual.

Family Life developed the Toolkit to share knowledge and skills, so that Creating Capable Communities can be replicated in other neighbourhoods.

The Toolkit is useful for anyone interested in leading neighbourhood strengthening and creating social inclusion, including:

- Participants in Creating Capable Communities programs
- Families and residents in the neighborhoods where Creating Capable Communities is being run
- Staff and volunteers running Creating Capable Communities programs
- Community agencies interested in adapting Creating Capable Communities for their neighbourhood

The Toolkit includes comprehensive information about Family Life's Creating Capable Communities program, including how the program can be replicated.

The Toolkit can also be used as a guide and adapted to meet the needs of other communities.

Checklists and activity guides provide assistance with getting started and keeping everyone involved and on track to achieve agreed activities.

Detailed evaluation techniques and strategies help make it easier to undertake program evaluation, review progress and develop improvements.



Creating Capable Communities – Key Activities

Central to Creating Capable Communities are the key activities which provide the focus for coming together, strengthening families, and promoting the wellbeing of children.

1. Creating Capable Leaders (described more fully further on in this Guide)

- Builds leadership and capacity of participants to work with others in the community to address community needs
- Provides pathways for community participation, future volunteering, employment and learning

2. After-School Club

- Provides help doing homework, after school snacks and play activities. It is run in high-need neighbourhoods by the residents and supported by Family Life staff and volunteers
- Promotes children's wellbeing and development and builds community connections

3. Breakfast Club

- Provides healthy breakfasts in a community kitchen, where children and adults work together to prepare the meal before the children head off to school – on time
- Is run in high-need neighbourhoods by the residents and supported by Family Life staff and volunteers
- Promotes children's wellbeing and development

4. Community Houses

Safe, secure, relaxed places where:

- Mums, dads, grandparents and carers go to make friends, join play groups and develop skills
- Family Life staff and volunteers promote children's wellbeing and development
- Staff and volunteers help parents to build local networks of support

5. Community Bubs

- Offers intensive long-term support from Family Life staff and volunteers, for vulnerable babies and their parents
- Helps mums and dads link into the community. Approximately 80% of babies stay living safely with their families

The Toolkit provides detailed descriptions about the how the five key activities work and integrate, along with how they can be adapted and developed for new neighbourhoods.



Community Strengthening – Principles

The key Principles that guided Creating Capable Communities can be used in any community strengthening project.

1. Partnership with residents

Is the core for successful community strengthening. The sharing of power amongst community members and leaving the decision making process in their hands is essential to achieving sustainable change in a community.

2. Building relationships

The first step in this process is to establish a core group of community members who are passionate about identifying and resolving the community needs. Once this core group is established, gaining support from the wider community and local service providers is the next step.

3. Exploring the possibilities

Allow community members the flexibility to be creative and explore the alternative solutions to the needs in their community.

4. Creating a vision for the future

It is vital that a sense of purpose and direction is created amongst the community members so that everyone is working towards the same goal. It is the community's responsibility to identify the vision, and staff or volunteers to provide the encouragement and support required.

5. Implementing structures of support

Establishing structures of support for participants, volunteers and staff (if applicable) will assist the community members to be successful in achieving their goals. Support may include debriefing, training, counselling, supervision and assistance helping them to achieve short term success and reach their long term goals. This is a balance of providing a safe space to try new things and leveraging existing strengths to build new skills.

6. Allowing for community ownership

Expert driven initiatives may not assist long term change of social structures in a community. Staff members or volunteers are encouraged to step back in a timely way and allow for the solutions to be created by those community members who are involved and care about what needs to change

7. Evidence-based initiatives

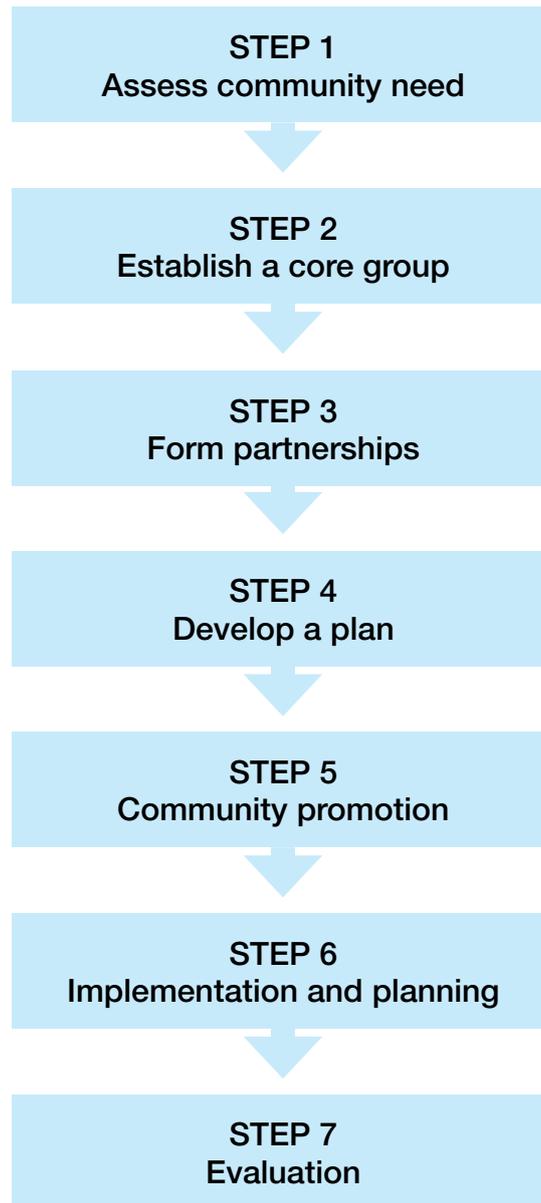
It is good practice to determine whether something works or not or has unexpected benefits. This can only be done by taking the time to reflect and document along the way what has worked well and what difference it has made to those involved. Any future planning needs to be informed from this learning for longer term sustainability and effectiveness.



Setting up an Activity – seven steps

The following steps were used to set up activities in the Creating Capable Communities program.

The steps are universal to other community strengthening activities.



Specific activity guides and program checklists for individual Creating Capable Communities activities are provided in the Toolkit.

Step 1: Assess community need

- Assess the needs of the families who live in the local community by meeting and talking with them.
- Activities which evolve directly from expressed community needs and new initiatives which respond to those needs, can be developed from direct engagement and conversations with the local community.
- Preclude any professional expectations for community strengthening initiatives. Needs assessments are conducted continually in partnership with residents.
- Informal observation by staff as well as planned and formal processes with questionnaires and focus groups are used.
- Actions are responsive to the changing needs of the community over time. This maintains relevance to local needs and continues to build confidence and trust in neighbourhood and family workers.
- Real social change occurs when a community feels passionately about an issue and works collaboratively towards the same goal.

Step 2: Establish a core group

- Form a core group of committed community members who are passionate about implementing change to meet the local needs.
- Because motivation will be high, the agency role will be to provide support and resources.
- Volunteers and/or staff members working with this core group must work to establish trust and build a collaborative and democratic working environment.
- The establishment of group rules at the start can assist with the process and development of the group.

Step 3: Form partnerships

- Widen the structures of support within the local community. Such strategies may be to contact your local council about local network meetings which meet in your area and visiting local community support services and learning facilities.
- Contact local people at sporting clubs and small businesses and the local maternal and child health centre, all of whom may be interested in hearing about or supporting the community's plan to address local needs.

Step 4: Develop a plan

- Work with your core group of community members to establish their goals and develop a plan of how they will achieve them.
- Encourage the group to plan regular meetings, set meeting agendas and write minutes of what was discussed and who will action what and by when. This formal process helps to prioritise issues or concerns and record the actions taken to respond to those needs.

Step 5: Community promotion

- Promote your activity in the local community to generate interest and attract participants. Word-of-mouth from the core group of community members is the most effective mechanism to build community support but other strategies such as school newsletters, local papers, letterbox drops, and through local services providers can also be useful.
- Build strong relationships with local services providers and at network meetings where you will be able to promote your activity to others who may be able to support by distributing fliers or forming a partnership with your group or organisation.

Step 6: Implementation and planning

- Use a community action plan to outline each individual program to be implemented. Use a Work Plan for keeping a track of progress.
- Getting something off the ground may be slower than envisaged and unexpected circumstances and opportunities may arise.
- Use the activity guides for tips about how to set up an activity. Remain flexible about the unique and changing needs of the community.
- Use these guides along with consulting with the partnerships you have created.



Step 7: Evaluation

- Program evaluation is a type of research that assesses the outcomes of a program or service. It is a critical part of the design and delivery of any community program. Common methods for program evaluation may include one or more of the following: Surveys, focus groups and/or interviews. There are other less formal but valuable ways of collecting information such as journaling, using a feedback box, observation and feedback through informal conversation. These are often used in addition to a more formal approach such as a survey.
- Program evaluation helps to assess the effectiveness of a community program. This leads to improvements in future programs.
- Start thinking about program evaluation in the planning phases of the program.

Detailed Community Action Plans, Work Plans and Evaluation strategies are included in the Toolkit



How to set up a Creating Capable Communities Activity

Community Strengthening Steps

Developing a Community Action Plan

1. Community concerns and needs

What are the concerns and needs of those living in the community?
Prioritise the issues; what's more urgent and what can be done later?
Take time to explore a range of solutions and agree on one or two to try first.

2. Picture of the future

What would people ideally like their community to look like?

3. Strengths and resources

Consider the current strengths and resources within the community.
Who else could help? Are there times when this concern or need is not present?

4. Strategies and actions

Outlines the strategies and actions to be implemented to address the community concern and need. What are some of the first steps? What are the practical issues which need to be dealt with first to get things started? eg. Finances, partnerships, staff or volunteers, a suitable venue.

5. By whom and by when

Who is responsible for implementing the strategy or action and by what date?

6. Outcome

Once the strategies and actions have been implemented what outcome did they achieve for the community?

Make SMART goals:

Specific – Measurable – Achievable – Realistic – Time-framed

Community Action Plan – Sample

Community concern	Picture of the future	Strengths and resources	Strategies and actions	By whom and when	Outcome (from 'actions')
<p>High levels of gang violence in housing estate community so parents do not let their children play outside.</p>	<p>For families to feel safe in their community and for children to be safe playing outside with parental supervision.</p>	<p>A group of parents wants to implement change in their community. Local police are willing to support initiatives.</p>	<p>Raise awareness of issue on housing estate. Organise a community meeting with all stakeholders.</p>	<p>Ayman – Jan 2010 Tash – Jan 2010 Steve – Feb 2010</p>	<p>A meeting has been held with parents and other community members and a plan has been developed on how to get started on addressing the issue.</p>
<p>Local school notices many children arrive at school hungry.</p>	<p>For all children to have had breakfast before starting school.</p>	<p>Community facility available on school site with kitchen facility and meal service area.</p>	<p>Create community plan for the issue. Awareness raising on importance of breakfast at schools. Enlist help from parents. Create a breakfast program with school parenting committee.</p>	<p>Roger – Jan 2010 Emilo – Feb 2010 Anna – Mar 2010</p>	<p>A weekly breakfast program has commenced at the school with parents rostered to help.</p>
<p>High rates of child protection notifications amongst local community.</p>	<p>Children are living safely at home with their parents.</p>	<p>Local families are wanting to support change. Maternal and Child health Nurses are willing to support initiatives.</p>	<p>Start activities at the local community house to engage and support isolated families. Enroll Maternal and Child Nurses to provide education sessions for parents. Recruit volunteers to help.</p>	<p>Nina – Feb 2010 Jane – Feb 2010 Joseph – Feb 2010</p>	<p>Parents are bringing their children to a weekly playgroup at the community house.</p>

What is Creating Capable Leaders?

This section provides a sample of one Creating Capable Communities activity called Creating Capable Leaders.

Creating Capable Leaders:

- Encourages residents to identify and address their community's needs
- Builds the leadership skills and capacity of participants to work with others in the community to address the needs
- Provides pathways for future employment, volunteering and learning

The program has two components:

- a) An eight-week Leadership training course covering modules such as community development, community planning, participation, networking, team building, coping with stress, lobbying and evaluation.
- b) Planning and implementation of a community project identified during the training course. Participants are given an additional six months support with their project idea, after the course. Projects often arise from the participant's own personal experiences and their assessment of a need in their community.

The Leadership program teaches skills including leadership, communication, participation, collaboration, networking and teamwork and also provides the support required to achieve the participant's goals.

Participants develop a sense of purpose through giving back to their community and striving to reach a common goal. The Leadership training produces incidental growth for participants in terms of their sense of ownership, empowerment and social connections with others in their community.

A participant empowering approach, within a social change framework is utilised throughout the course to ensure the goals of self esteem, sustainable community outcomes and project ownership are achieved.

"I can do anything - nothing is impossible, you just need to try"

Creating Capable Leaders – Essentials

- Involve participants in all aspects of the decision making process
- Facilitator's role is to teach the content of the program and support group members to be successful
- Provide six months project support to consolidate progress
- Allow group members to continually reflect on their progress, areas for improvement and lessons learnt
- Focus on the lessons learnt and growth achieved along the way, rather than simply the project outcome
- Encourage and celebrate small successes early on in the project
- Ensure the content of the training package is relevant to the needs of the group and adjust accordingly
- Refer participants who may require extra assistance with personal issues into counselling or support
- Ensure a qualified worker is present during the program. Their role is to identify and support participants with issues that may become barriers to their participation



Feedback from participants in the Creating Capable Leaders Program

- 100% reported they had made friends
- 80% reported they were more aware of their child's needs
- 90% reported increased self-confidence

- 90% reported they had a better knowledge community services and support
- 80% reported they were better able to use community services and support for themselves and their family
- 60% reported they had learnt skills which will help them with future education or employment
- 40% reported they had started a job, a course or voluntary work.

- 60% gained a greater awareness and felt more able to access community resources for themselves or others
- 60% felt more connected and recognised the importance of connection to one's community
- 70% felt they could play an important role in contributing to their community.

- 70% felt they could have a positive influence in their family
- 70% had a greater awareness of their own ability and capacity to be a leader
- 70% felt they had a greater confidence and ability to solve problems

- 60% felt they could influence their family's future
- 60% had plans to seek out future employment, training or volunteer work

Almost 100% of participants said they had the confidence to seek out future employment, education or training!

Creating Capable Leaders – Four Years of Success

38 residents have graduated from Creating Capable Leaders programs held in seven different neighbourhoods where parents experience barriers to community participation, learning and employment.

Each group has identified needs in their neighbourhood and been assisted to develop a responsive project which enrolls other residents who carry the community project forward leading to ongoing change and support.

Example of projects include:

A ‘Sing and Grow’ group at the Keith Street Community House for children who had missed out on kindergarten helping to prepare them for school and the parents to build friendships and informal supports in the neighbourhood.

A return to work program, named REFRESH by the graduates, and targeted to parents needing to become employed when their youngest child turned eight. Offered at the Keith Street Community House and then repeated in Cheltenham at the Family Life social enterprise training facility, the REFRESH project leaders have now helped more than 30 other residents to grow the confidence to volunteer, take up training opportunities and become employed.

A ‘Welcome to Prep’ program was started by graduates in an isolated neighbourhood with low parent participation in school. 70 parents received welcome bags and coffee mugs for joining in coffee and chat groups with teachers as their children started school.

A ‘Food for Everyone’ project was established in a culturally diverse primary school where the Creating Capable Leaders graduates have increasingly enrolled parents in providing a healthy lunch program which has now led to a thriving school kitchen garden as well.

- Each project sees graduates apply the confidence and skills developed through the Creating Capable Leaders program.
- Each project applies the principles of Creating Capable Communities (page 13) and the Seven Step Activity Plan (see page 15)
- Each project delivers on the Creating Capable Communities goals of strengthening families by developing neighbourhood support networks and driving towards improving children’s and parents’ health and wellbeing.

Additional community benefits flow from Creating Capable Leaders’ direct impact on parents’ increased volunteering and employment

Q & A

Q. How can Family Life help?

A. Family Life is available to work with those organisations wanting to establish Creating Capable Communities by providing implementation advice, consultation and training courses.

Q. How can I get a Creating Capable Communities Toolkit?

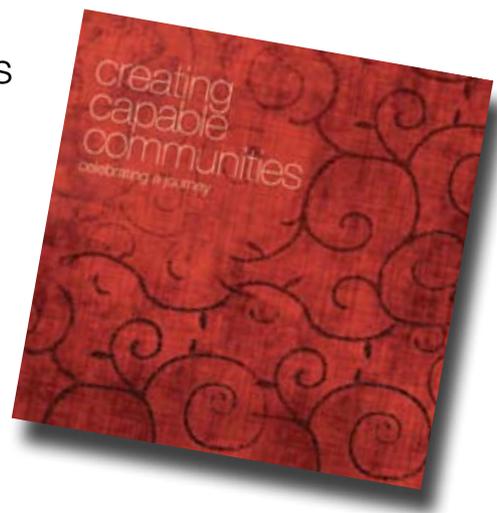
A. Contact Family Life.

Q. Do I have to do everything in the Toolkit?

A. No. The Toolkit is just a guide to give you ideas on how to get started, or what activities might work in your organisation or community.

Q. How can I get a copy of Family Life's Creating Capable Communities 'celebrating a journey' which tells the background to Creating Capable Communities and people's stories?

A. Contact Family Life.



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Creating Capable Communities Toolkit Guide

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With grateful thanks



Australian Government

**Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

For nine years of financial support towards
our community strengthening program.





capable communities
strong families
thriving children



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