

2000 NSW Health Promotion Demonstration Research Grant Scheme

Title	Making connections in the MAC
AHS	South Western Sydney Area Health Service
Principal Investigators	Ms W Peacock Ms T Heathwood
Funding Years	2001 to 2003
Funding	\$40,000
Aim	Develop an early intervention program to increase connectedness with school, and address risk behaviours of 8 to 12 year olds in the Macquarie Fields Housing Estate.
Target population	8 – 12 year old children
Research Questions	Is it possible to reconnect 8 – 12 year old children with school and address risk taking behaviours?
Method	Action research methods: the researchers set out to use a co-operative inquiry approach based on an action research study design. This nature of the inquiry was determined by the level of participation of community workers, community members and children. A number of qualitative research tools were used to gather information from participants in the study, including from children, parents, teachers, project staff and community workers.
New knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with children 8-12 years who are involved in ‘at risk’ behaviours requires moving beyond formalistic ways of working that rely on meetings, reference groups and committees • Absenteeism was seen by parents, teachers, and workers on the estate to often be related to conditions within the family • Rather than linking absenteeism and risk taking behaviour in children as a matter of course, it was noted that some high absentee children were absent from school to support their families • Children and parents considered bullying to be a big issue at school, although teachers did not • Any intervention to address absenteeism and risk behaviours in this age group needs to be broad-ranging, across all relevant services, locally based and intensive • Interventions should be strengths-based, and involve the community (and the children)