

2015 PLAY YOUR PART AWARDS FOR INSPIRING PREVENTION INITIATIVES VICTORIA

To: Family Life

For: Community Bubs – Celebrating 10 years

Community Bubs supports vulnerable babies and children to live safely in the care of their own families.

One of the mothers who participated in the program said that: “It rescued me from the system, ... from a system of child protection, and assessments, all I needed was a break. My life is so different now, I married, I now have my four kids and run my own business.”

For more than 10 years Community Bubs has helped approximately 250 babies with a significant risk of child protection intervention and child removal, in the southern region of Melbourne. Typically these families were experiencing a lack of support, mental illness, drug dependency (parents and baby), social isolation, unemployment and disabilities.

Provided by the community agency Family Life, the program’s philosophy is of a whole-of-family, whole-of-community approach that respects culture and place, for strengthening families so children can thrive.

During 2013-14, the Community Bubs program helped 43 vulnerable families with 100 per cent of babies staying living safely with their families with the support of the community.

The program optimises parent’s care of children from pre-birth to four years, through intensive home visiting by both professionals and trained volunteers, with a strong focus on helping families connect to their local community.

Community Bubs provides long term support for at-risk families, until the baby is one year old and the mother is ‘on her feet’. The program features integrated, comprehensive care plans, and counselling, mediation, no interest loans, children’s contact services, family violence and mental health support services.

Family Life Community Houses offer a range of specialist services that enable participants to develop informal social supports and to participate in education programs and local community networks. There are also opportunities for mums to become leaders and help the next group of struggling mums.

Family Life, CEO, Jo Cavanagh OAM said that Community Bubs provides a cost effective, proven alternative to the removal of children from the home through a whole of community approach that supports mothers to become change agents in their own lives and positively care for their own children.

“Were trying to normalise their experience of parenting with the hope and belief that every child can be cared for safely in the care of their family. If we give them the right supports and interventions for the parents to be the best that they can be for their children,” said Ms Cavanagh.

The Monash University evaluation of the initial 3 year pilot project program, found that it was proven to provide an effective early intervention program for the majority of participant families. Outcomes included 87% of participant families developed and maintained appropriate community connections, 100% of the infants have remained living safely at home and that 80% of participant families showed reduced risk factors, and have been assessed by the parent support worker as being at lower risk.

Overall Community Bubs has an 85% success rate in enabling at-risk babies to live safely in the care of their families.

The 10 year Community Bubs [reunion video](#) features mothers ten years on from the initial pilot program and shows them to be more resilient, as well as employed and successful parents.

In the words of one of the mothers in the video: “Community Bubs is a great place for mothers and for fathers to get support. “I didn’t feel alone, I felt loved and part of something...without this I wouldn’t know where I’d be.”

Another mother said that her experience with Community Bubs was life saving. “It provided a home and family.”

Family Life are now developing Community Bubs Plus to work specifically with young pregnant or soon-to-be parents leaving out-of-home care in response to alarming rates of teen pregnancy and homelessness for this at-risk group of care leavers.