

Research Directions

Office of Research Services

Supporting Local Communities

Dr Janette Perz, Dr Danuta Chessor, Dr Emilee Gilbert and Professor Jane Ussher from the School of Psychology are collaborating with local schools in the Penrith area to explore the impact of school community support projects on quality of life and mental wellbeing through a grant from Penrith Panthers community development foundation Panthers on the Prowl.



'In 2004, the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs allocated over \$130 million to initiatives designed to strengthen disadvantaged communities through funding of innovative, small-scale projects that would develop life skills and support families and children at a local level' says Dr Perz. 'In the Penrith area, 4 such school-based projects have since been initiated by Panthers on the Prowl, focussing on healthy lifestyles, family skills, classroom activities and teachers' aide mentoring. Our pilot research project will begin a longer-term systematic assessment of these projects.'

Working closely with key stakeholders in the local community, including parents, teachers, students, school principals and NSW Department of Education and Training School Area Directors, the research team will conduct focus groups and one-on-one interviews to assess the attitudes, experiences and expectations of participants and organisers of the community support projects. This information will be used to evaluate how successful the schemes have been in meeting the expected community support outcomes; how the projects may have contributed to the social welfare and personal wellbeing of the participants, and; what impact the projects may have had on the social or financial disadvantage of the community.

This research is expected to provide valuable evidence about how well the Penrith-based community support projects are currently operating and how these services could be improved to provide families and individuals in the community with effective parenting, teaching and life skills and improved social, physical and mental health outcomes.

Project Title: 'Local Answers' – A pilot study examining the effects and impact of a school community support program

Funding has been set at: \$19,800
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