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Evaluation of the Implementation of the "All Children Being Safe" (ACBS) Program In Three Preschools in NSW

Prepared by:

**A/Prof Manjula Waniganayake
Ms Karen Roberts**

Institute of Early Childhood
Macquarie University
Access Macquarie Ltd

(December 2011)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation report is based on the NAPCAN sponsored adaptation of the "All Children Being Safe" (ACBS) program for early childhood, in Kempsey, a rural community with a high proportion of Indigenous families, located on the mid north coast of NSW. Macquarie University was invited to evaluate the adaptation and implementation of the ACBS project in three selected preschools in Kempsey. The ACBS is a protective behaviours program originally developed for use with primary school aged children. The Greenhill Primary School in Kempsey initially developed it in response to the request for the development of a culturally safe protective behaviours program that matched the child protection curriculum of the NSW State Government, administered by the Department of Education and Training (DET). The school children created the artwork for the storybooks and the training package was developed by NAPCAN with funding provided by the WESTPAC Bank. The CAGES Foundation is responsible for funding the extension of the program to preschoolers in Kempsey that covered the costs of the adaptation, implementation and evaluation of the Early Childhood ACBS program.

The Early Childhood ACBS program was implemented in the preschools during 2011, and the evaluation report reflects the voices of the children, parents, educators and community members who participated in this project. The NAPCAN project manager and coordinator established a Project Steering Committee consisting of the preschool teachers and local Indigenous community services personnel to provide advice on all aspects of project design, implementation and evaluation. During December 2010, two of the selected preschools trialled the original ACBS stories with a group of pre-schoolers at their centres. Feedback from this pilot study was also taken into account in the development of the full package of resources for the modified ACBS program.

The Project Coordinator, who was an experienced, university qualified early childhood teacher, had responsibility for reviewing the content of the primary ACBS program, and making the necessary modifications for use with 3-5 year old children in preschool settings. This included shortening the text of the five animal stories. An important addition was the development of an educator's resource kit consisting of items such as puppets, music CDs, dress-up clothes, as well as art-craft materials for use in developing learning activities for pre-schoolers. These resource kits were supplied to each preschool to assist educators with the implementation of the ACBS program. As indicated in the evaluation, this resource kit was invaluable in establishing interest, adding depth and creativity as well as making the experiences meaningful for pre-schoolers.

The ACBS Program outcomes were defined in terms of children, parents and community as well as preschool staff, and were used as the focus for this evaluation. In collaboration with the key local stakeholders matching evaluation strategies and instruments were designed. The aim was to ascertain evaluation data in a continuous way throughout the program implementation as well as prior to commencement and one month after completion. The overall evaluation plan was formally documented as an evaluation framework and is located in Appendix 2 of this report. Likewise, the full set of instruments matched against the specific objectives has been placed in Appendix 3.

Children, parents, educators and other community members actively participated in a variety of ways throughout the implementation of the ACBS program in Kempsey, and

willingly contributed to the evaluation data collection. Based on the analysis of this data, the key findings from this study include the following:

- Consultation with and collaboration among key stakeholders is vital to the program's success and needs to be coordinated by a qualified early childhood educator. In this instance, the stakeholders included local Indigenous people and community members, family members and early childhood staff.
- Early childhood educators implementing the program need to have a sound knowledge of and rapport with the children involved, as well as well developed skills in appropriately questioning children and eliciting responses.
- Training and support for early childhood educators, in relation to child protection responsibilities and general program implementation, needs to be available both prior to and during implementation.
- Long-term impacts of the program can be evaluated through a process of individual program assessment, continued follow up sessions and reviews including the children and families involved.
- The early childhood ACBS program was particularly enhanced by a range of resources and activities relevant to all areas of young children's learning and development.
- Promoting key concepts about child safety relevant and meaningful to each local community can further enhance the early childhood ACBS program.

These findings from the evaluation project were used in developing 11 recommendations for consideration by NAPCAN in enhancing the Early Childhood ACBS program further and expanding its implementation in other preschools throughout Australia.

This evaluation highlights the potential benefits of the ACBS protective behaviours program when used appropriately by early childhood educators with sound expertise and experience of working with young children and their families. This project also reflects the strengths of an authentic community partnership that can facilitate the coming together of children, parents, professionals and the community. It is clear that adopting a whole of community approach can ensure that learning about child protection and safety can be examined in an integrated way across the community. Such an approach can thereby also make learning about keeping children safe sustainable as a life-long commitment by all involved.

Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake and Ms Karen Roberts
Institute of Early Childhood
Macquarie University
December 2011.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1:

- That NAPCAN recommends the appointment of an early childhood educator as the coordinator of ACBS project development and management in each community.

Recommendation #2:

- That in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating the use of the ACBS program, consultation with the community is built into each community's approach to the program.

Recommendation #3:

- That when delivering the ACBS program in any early childhood setting, emphasise the importance of collaboration amongst staff in planning and implementing the program in a holistic way.

Recommendation #4:

- That NAPCAN ensures that future ACBS programs are implemented by capable educators who can establish good rapport with the children and families participating in the programs.

Recommendation #5:

- That NAPCAN provides an orientation session at commencement and finds ways of providing adequate support and guidance for educators during program implementation.

Recommendation #6:

- That all educators involved in the implementation of the ACBS program have thorough prior training in their child protection responsibilities and with particular attention to ways of responding to a disclosure.

Recommendation #7:

- That NAPCAN includes in the ACBS manual, program evaluation instruments used in this evaluation to enable early childhood settings to do their own follow up by assessing learnings with children, parents and community.

Recommendation #8:

- That NAPCAN develops a longitudinal research study to assess the long-term impact of the ACBS programs across communities.

Recommendation #9:

- That the ACBS educator's resource kit supplied by NAPCAN includes both puppets and costumes for role-play and drama activities.

Recommendation #10:

- That when developing further suggestions to use with the ACBS program, NAPCAN considers including activities and experiences that cover a broad range of learning and skill development.

Recommendation #11:

- That NAPCAN gives due consideration to the follow up suggestions offered by everyone involved in the Kempsey study, as listed in this report.

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Acknowledgements

We offer our sincere thanks to the children, parents and staff at each of the participating centres for collaborating with us throughout the evaluation. In preparing this report we have attempted to capture their input in authentic ways. Likewise, we want to say a special thank you to the external members of the Project Steering Committee for their wise counsel and participation in all aspects of project design and implementation.

From the start, Angela Walsh and Michelle Rose, as the NAPCAN Project Manager and ACBS Project Coordinator respectively, welcomed us, ensuring we had a sound orientation to the local community. Their involvement in liaising with all the stakeholders was critical to the success of the evaluation data collection and analysis. Thank you both for your support, local insights and professionalism in working with us throughout this project.

We trust that this report provides a comprehensive overview of the successful implementation of the ACBS program in Kempsey, and the analysis provides sufficient learnings for use in future planning and development of this program in other early childhood settings. We felt that everyone involved in this project shared a lifelong commitment to keeping children safe. We hope that in some way our work contributes to achieving this goal. It has been an honour and a pleasure to work on this project with all of you.

With best wishes

Associate Professor Manjula Waniganayake and Ms Karen Roberts

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Macquarie University
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December 2011

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is based on the NAPCAN sponsored adaptation of the "All Children Being Safe" (ACBS) program for preschools, in a rural community, on the mid north coast of NSW. Macquarie University was invited to evaluate the adaptation and implementation of the ACBS project in the three selected preschools in Kempsey. Each of these preschools had a high number of children and families from Indigenous backgrounds. The project began with a pilot study to explore the possibilities of using the ACBS program during October – December 2010 with one group of children in three preschools. Due to difficulties with staffing, this phase of the project was implemented in two centres only.

Based on the learnings from this initial phase carried out in 2010, the Project Manager, began modifying the stories included in the ACBS program to make it more appropriate for pre-schoolers. With input from the preschool staff and the Steering Committee members, a revised program was finalised by April 2011 and implementation began in each centre in Term 2.

Participating preschools and key educators:

- South Kempsey Preschool: Shirley
- Dalaigur Preschool: Roslyn
- ABC Learning Centre, West Kempsey: Melanie

Project Period: July 2010 to September 2011

NAPCAN Project Manager: Angela Walsh

ACBS Project Coordinator: Michelle Rose

ACBS Project Evaluators: Manjula Waniganayake and Karen Roberts

Project Steering Committee: Shirley, Roslyn and Melanie (the educators)
Janet Jensen, Marilyn Dean, Karen Hall and Delya Smith

At the beginning of 2011, Michelle Rose, the Project Coordinator, examined the objectives of the ACBS project developed for implementation with primary school children, and modified these to make the learning more appropriate and relevant for children aged 3-5 years. In turn, in discussion with the project manager and coordinator, the evaluators used the modified learning objectives to develop an evaluation framework to assess the learnings from the ACBS project implementation during 2011. These objectives were categorised in three ways, targeting learning directed at the children, the preschool staff and the parents and community. The evaluation framework (see Appendix 2) was developed with input from the ACBS Project Steering Committee, comprising the preschool teachers, and key local personnel who were actively involved in child protection matters in Kempsey.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

"All Children Being Safe" (ACBS) is a protective behaviours program originally developed for use with early primary school aged children. The Greenhill Primary School, Kempsey, initially developed the ACBS Primary Program in response to the request for the development of a culturally safe protective behaviours program that matched the Child Protection curriculum of the State Government, administered by the Department of Education and Training (DET). Over 95% of the students at Greenhill Public School identify as Aboriginal. The program was developed with the support of local service providers and a team of community workers from NAPCAN, Kempsey, Schools as Community Centres, North Coast Area Health Service, and the Durri Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS). Acknowledging the effectiveness of the use of dreamtime stories when developing problem solving skills with the children in the school, Local Greenhill Elders were consulted in relation to which animals and birds were appropriate for the Greenhill community. The school children created the artwork for the storybooks and the training package was developed by NAPCAN with funding provided by the WESTPAC Bank.

The goal of the ACBS program is to provide children with appropriate behaviours when interacting with children and adults in meaningful and non-threatening ways to assist them to feel strong and stay safe in their communities. Five stories using bush animals found in the local community provide the foundation for learning in the ACBS program. They contain messages around safety and are explored with the children through a variety of learning activities.

The ACBS program was piloted in one school, and then expanded to three others located within Kempsey. This pilot was well received, winning two awards for promoting health and wellbeing. The CAGES Foundation approached NAPCAN in 2010 in relation to funding the expansion of the ACBS Program into rural and remote Aboriginal Communities across NSW. The option of a preschool adaptation was discussed due to interest that had been expressed by Dalaigur Pre-school in Greenhill Kempsey. CAGES then agreed to fund the adaptation of the ACBS program and its implementation in 3 preschools in Kempsey, NSW.

The NAPCAN Project Coordinator, an experienced and university qualified early childhood educator, then adapted the original ACBS program targeting primary school aged children, to make it more appropriate for use with preschool aged children in the local community (see Appendix 1 for details). This modified early childhood ACBS program was aimed largely at 4 to 5 year olds, and can be implemented over a period of at least 6 weeks. Overall, this evaluation project reflects an authentic community partnership as all aspects of the ACBS program design, implementation and evaluation included the key stakeholders - especially the children, their families and staff at the three preschools.

2.1. Child protection in context

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1989), along with child protection legislation, identify that all children have a right to be safe from harm. The NSW Government, in their efforts to keep children safe, following Justice Wood's *Report of the special commission of inquiry into child protection services in NSW (2008)*, has been coordinating a range of prevention and early intervention strategies between governments, agencies and communities. A family support approach has been shown to be particularly valuable in helping families with their role of parenting and caring for their children.

The value of a protective behaviours education program such as the ACBS is in the empowerment of children to keep themselves safe in all situations. It acknowledges that danger is not restricted to strangers, and that a person known to the victim commits the overwhelming majority of all types of child abuse.

The protective behaviours program was initially developed in the USA in the 1970's and the program was introduced to Australia in the 1980's as an educational strategy to prevent child abuse (www.edsite.com.au/pbnt/protect/html). Following program evaluations, it has since been adapted to suit people of all ages in all situations where personal safety is a concern, particularly acknowledging issues of domestic violence and societal violence such as harassment and bullying. (Tomison & Poole, 2000, p.4). Protective behaviours encourage people to assert their right to feel safe, listen to what their body tells them, and follow up by taking action to solve problems or seek assistance from others who can help them (www.kidsmatter.edu.au/primary/programs-guide/protective-behaviours).

The National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children was established in 2009. (FAHCSIA, 2009) In NSW, early childhood educators are mandatory reporters under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act (1998). They are required to undertake training in identifying and responding to children at risk, and they have a duty of care to help ensure the safety and well being of all children in their care. Implementing a protective behaviours program requires an understanding of child protection issues and supports them in their duty of care.

2.2. Centre profiles (as at December 2010)

Each of the three centres was selected for the ACBS program implementation for a variety of reasons. One of the key reasons included their location in the same area as the schools that implemented the ACBS. Other reasons included the high numbers of Indigenous children and/or staff in their services and their commitment to collaboration with Indigenous members of the local community. A brief profile of each of the preschools involved in this project was documented using data from the centre profile questionnaires completed by the educators at the start of the pilot study in December 2010.

Centre 1

This is a not-for-profit, stand-alone community owned and managed centre. It had the capacity to enrol up to 49 children aged 2 to 5 years. At the time of the pilot study, there were 28 children enrolled. All children except 2 were from an Indigenous background. It employed 5 educators, 2 assistants in each room and 1 floater. Indigenous staff comprised the educator/director and 2 assistants.

Centre 2

At this preschool enrolments comprised 117 children aged 2 to 5 years. The centre was a not-for-profit, stand-alone, community owned and managed service. There were 14 educators (9 part time) and all but 5 were Indigenous. Almost all children at the centre came from an Indigenous background. Of these, 14 children were registered in the child protection system.

Centre 3

This long day care centre catered for 76 children aged birth to 6 years. Of these, 31 children were from an Indigenous background, and included 6 children registered in the child protection system. It was a not-for-profit centre, owned and managed by a large national organisation. There were 11 educators employed with 2 working part time, and only one educator with a university degree in early childhood.

2.3. Working with Aboriginal people and communities

The incidence of child abuse and neglect in Australia continues to be alarming, and for Indigenous children, the statistics are particularly concerning.

In 2009-2010, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprised 4.6% of Australian children and 26.6% of all confirmed reports of abuse or neglect. This means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 7.7 times more likely than other children to be the subject of a confirmed report of abuse or neglect than non-Indigenous children.

(Beryl, Bromfield & Lamont, 2011, p.1)

Under the NSW Government's "Keep Them Safe" Plan for all children, an Aboriginal Impact Statement was developed to ensure a participative and collaborative approach to child protection work with Aboriginal children, families and communities, and address the over representation of Indigenous children in the child protection system.

(NSW Government, 2010, p.1)

The original ACBS program for school aged children involved a collaborative partnership with local schools and Aboriginal health and community organisations. It also respectfully acknowledged the Aboriginal traditional

owners of the land and the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people. This collaboration with and respect for local Aboriginal people was vital to the success of the program, and has also been significant in the adaptation and implementation of the modified early childhood version of the ACBS program used in this project in 2011.

A number of resources developed to support people working with Aboriginal people and communities describe effective approaches as operating on the following principles:

- Consideration of the historical context of colonisation, racism, discrimination, disadvantage and cultural dislocation and child removal from families
- Priority of cultural safety, Indigenous managed services with control of services and responsibility for outcomes, and appropriate and adequate resources and support for agencies

(Higgins, 2010, p.1-3)

- Consultation and involvement of leading Aboriginal community members, involving as many Aboriginal elders and leaders and representatives from all local family groups and Aboriginal organisations
- Engaging in proper effective consultation in an equal relationship

(NSW DoCS, 2009, p 30-34)

These strategies indicate that, while the child protection situation is very serious for Aboriginal families, "there are also many strengths in Aboriginal communities and a deep commitment to the care of children on the part of community members" (NSW Government, 2010, p.3) The ACBS project development, implementation, and evaluation findings have also highlighted this strong commitment among Aboriginal community members in the Kempsey area.

2.4. Adaptation of the ACBS program for pre-schoolers

Based on stories depicting Australian bush animals, and in consultation with Indigenous elders and others, the ACBS program was specifically designed for use with Indigenous children. It can also be useful for children from other cultural backgrounds. Modifications made to the ACBS program aim to have more relevance for preschool aged children and early childhood programs and curriculum. The preschool version of the ACBS program provided direct links to the National Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) and the National Quality Standard (DEEWR, 2010).

To make it more user-friendly for pre-schoolers, a number of adaptations were made by the Project Coordinator (See Appendix 1) Some of the key changes included can be synthesised as follows. The ACBS storybooks, which are the centre piece of the program, were enlarged; the cover and pages made of thicker paper, and the cover colour changed to distinguish it from the primary school storybooks. The stories were shortened for use with pre-

schoolers. The overall program allows for flexibility in terms of timing and staging of how the stories are presented according to children's interests and abilities. The introduction section in particular, has been shortened to offer more discussion of the relevant concepts being introduced or expanded on throughout the program.

An educator's resource kit consisting of props and creative media, such as puppets, costumes, books and pictures, music and movement CDs, and art and craft resources, suitable for the age group was developed to accompany the program implementation in preschools. Items such as colouring stencils and work sheets used with primary school children were excluded. Facial expression paddles and emotion cards were included to support learning and discussion about feelings. A map for each story was included to help children recall the previous story and be introduced to the next one. The stories can be set up for use on a SMART board or an interactive white board, and thereby engaging children in the program through computer-mediated technology containing vivid images that can enhance the story messages.

3. EVALUATION ORIENTATION

In preparing this evaluation report, a brief review of other evaluations of child protection programs was undertaken, along with a review of literature concerning child protection program evaluation projects.

3.1. Evaluation literature

"As the main goal of an evaluation is to indicate whether a program is effective or not, it is important that an evaluation is conducted properly". (Lamont, 2009, p.2) This can involve pre- and post- tests to ascertain change for participants against program goals. A comparison group is also usually recommended except in the case of child welfare and protection programs, where ethical consideration needs to be given in terms of preventing a control or comparison group of children from accessing the program. The final element involves follow-up testing to assess program success beyond the short term.

Obviously, adequate data collection is the key to evaluating program effectiveness. Evaluations of prevention programs are generally qualitative and descriptive, and the use of focus groups and interviews with participants and staff are common.

The evaluation of Braveheart's prevention program called "Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure" (Evans & Peck Services, 2008) included pre and post questionnaires for teachers regarding individual child participants, an observation sheet for teachers to use during the program, and a feedback form relating to teachers' perceptions of the program. A parent survey was

also used by families to record children's understandings and parents' own thoughts about the use of an at home activity book, following the program. For children, a child activity sheet was included where they could draw what they had learnt from the program.

An evaluation of the original primary school ACBS program involved post program interviews with children, while school teachers were surveyed immediately after the program was implemented and again several months later. The evaluation focused on children's memory of stories and concepts as well as school teachers' and children's thoughts about the ACBS program.

In assessing effectiveness of programs on protective behaviours, "program evaluations are fundamentally designed to assist with the planning of future programs and/or to improve pre-existing programs." (Tomison & Poole, 2000, p.6) They need to be tailored to meet the needs of all stakeholders as well as to fulfil a specific and required purpose.

3.2. Evaluation framework adopted for this study

A wide range of evaluation strategies and instruments were developed and utilised to capture data reflecting the learning that occurred throughout the implementation of the ACBS program during 2011. Each of these instruments was designed to match the participants' learning perspectives and assess the anticipated outcomes as noted on Table 1.

The evaluators designed these instruments with input from the preschool staff, the project coordinator, project manager as well as members of the Project Steering Committee. This consultative approach was important in ensuring the relevance and appropriateness of the proposed evaluation strategies and instruments to be deployed in this project. Some of the evaluation instruments were designed as a set of common questions to be used by the educators consistently throughout the weekly implementation activities. The evaluation instruments were used not just as evaluation tools, but also as teaching and learning strategies. That is, the questions were aimed at stimulating and engaging educators and children to think reflectively about child safety and protection with respect to children's feelings and perceptions of safety and security. The educators also completed reflective questionnaires at different intervals, such as at the completion of each module and when the full program had been delivered at their centre.

Asking children questions prior to, during, and following implementation of the ACBS program was an essential part of this evaluation. Early childhood educators are well placed to interview young children, who are likely to feel comfortable in their preschool environment and with the educator, especially if they are seen as similar and empathic. (Hill, 2005, p. 72) Reinforcing this perspective, Brooker (2001) states the children's own teacher or carer working within their normal daily setting..(her) ongoing observations of the children, her familiarity with their backgrounds and behaviours, and her alertness to the effects of the research methods upon them, all help to produce good and reliable evidence. (p. 167)

A full list of the evaluation instruments used in this project is presented in [Table 1](#), and the actual documents have been included in the Appendices at the end of this report. To assist with making sense of the findings of this project, the links between the evaluation strategies and instruments and the anticipated learning outcomes, are presented in [Tables 2-4](#).

Table 1: List of Evaluation strategies and instruments used

Pre-program implementation – general
1. Centre profile questionnaire
2. Field visit notes by evaluators including discussions with individual teachers, project managers and the Steering Committee
With Children
1. Pre-program questions with 1 -2 small groups one week before program implementation
2. Drawings of safe people and places (pre-program)
3. Post-program questions with 1 -2 small groups one month after program implementation
4. Children's drawings of safe people and places (post-program)
With educators
1. Teacher reflections on child protection legislation
2. Pre-program overview questions - teachers reflections
3. After each module – teacher reflections
4. Post-program overview questions – teacher reflections
With parents and community
1. Pre-program questions to teachers (see overview questions 4 to 7)
2. Teacher documentation of relevant conversations with parents & other community members regarding their experiences with their children about the content included in the ACBS program
3. Community gathering and facilitated conversation by the evaluation team
4. Email questions to Steering Committee members
With Program Coordinators
Field notes, telephone conferences, email correspondence and entry and exit discussions during site visits to Kempsey in December 2010 and August 2011.

The next three tables (Table 2-4) show the connections between the anticipated learning outcomes and the evaluation strategies and instruments used in this study.

Table 2: Outcomes and evaluation involving the CHILDREN

ANTICIPATED LEARNING OUTCOMES	EVALUATION STRATEGIES & INSTRUMENTS (see Appendix 2)
<p>To demonstrate an awareness of the concepts of safe and unsafe living through an ability to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify safe and unsafe feelings and that every child has the right to feel safe. • Identify people in their community who keep them safe. • Feel safe, secure and supported. • Develop the language to communicate safe or unsafe behaviours / situations. • Identify people who can help them if they have been hurt. • Interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect. • Develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities 	<p>The evaluators developed a common set of questions for the three teachers to use with the children at their centres, to engage them in discussions in small groups at regular intervals as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions used one week BEFORE program implementation • Questions used at the completion of each module • Questions used one month AFTER implementation • Pedagogical documentation – teachers also documented their observations of children's learning using digital photography as well as preparing classroom displays and portfolios of children's work that were developed during the implementation of the program.

Table 3: Outcomes and evaluation involving the Preschool EDUCATORS

ANTICIPATED LEARNING OUTCOMES	EVALUATION STRATEGIES & INSTRUMENTS (see Appendix 2)
<p>To demonstrate an enhanced awareness of child protection strategies by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Participation by all preschool staff in training and information on child protection including support services in their community. b) Improving the standards of child protection practices, particularly in light of new legislation or information. c) Incorporating the modified ACBS program for early childhood into their preschool programs. d) Engaging parents and other family members in the delivery of ACBS program in their centres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each teacher completed a Child Protection Questionnaire to indicate their current awareness of relevant matters before the commencement of the ACBS program • The teachers also completed a questionnaire individually BEFORE the ACBS project was implemented. • Likewise, AFTER the project implementation was completed, all teachers participated in a group discussion and completed questionnaires.

Table 4: Outcomes and evaluation involving the PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

ANTICIPATED LEARNING OUTCOMES	EVALUATION STRATEGIES & INSTRUMENTS (Appendix 2)
<p>To demonstrate an enhanced awareness of child protection issues in the wider community through</p> <p>a) Participation in community workshops about the ACBS program</p> <p>b) Engagement in the delivery of the ACBS program e.g. craft activities, storytelling, drama, music and movement.</p> <p>c) Sharing the ACBS program with their children at home through culturally appropriate literature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A centre profile survey questionnaire was used to ascertain information about child protection issues impacting on the local community, particularly the children and families attending the participating preschools. • In addition, the evaluators asked the teachers to document relevant conversations with parents and other family members regarding their experiences with their children about content included in the ACBS program. • Following the completion of the ACBS project implementation, parents and community members from each of the preschools were invited to a community gathering over lunch to discuss their perspectives on the ACBS project. The questions used during this discussion are included in Appendix 2. • Members of the Project Steering Group were also sent a questionnaire by email, asking them to comment about their reflections on how the ACBS program was received by the Kempsey community.

Overall, the preschool staff implemented the evaluation instruments developed to collate data on children's learning. In turn, the evaluators engaged the preschool staff in individual interviews and group discussions to ascertain their perspectives on using a range of evaluation instruments. Three parents representing two of the three preschools participated in the community gathering and actively contributed to the evaluation. Two members of the Steering Committee also completed an email questionnaire, and thereby adding to the community perspectives on the ACBS program implementation. The project coordinator and the manager were also included in interviews and discussions throughout the program implementation.

The evaluators also presented a workshop attended by the preschool educators and members of the Steering Committee, for two purposes. Firstly, by placing the ACBS project within a children's rights perspective, the workshop looked at preschool educators' child protection obligations. Secondly, the evaluation strategies and instruments designed for this project were discussed and refined to ensure that participants had a good understanding of the expectations of, and ethics involved in evaluating the implementation of the ACBS program with pre-schoolers.

4. PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

In this section we present the data collected and analysed for this evaluation. This presentation is organised under FOUR sub-headings focusing on the anticipated outcomes of the project for children, educators, and parents and community as well as program highlights and improvements. When reading these findings, it is important to note the following:

a) The educators who participated in this study, provided much data in the form of photographic images, video recordings and text-based data when responding to evaluation questionnaires and notes taken during discussions with small groups of children. This data contained input from children and their families as well as teacher reflections. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, we have not identified the primary sources and provide summative comments based on our collation of the data.

b) The ACBS project work began in 2010, and two of the centres implemented the program without major modifications to a group of preschoolers that year. Some of these children were present when the modified program was being implemented during 2011. When these children participated in the pre-program discussions, their exposure to the ACBS stories during 2010 can be seen in the responses recorded in 2011.

4.1. OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

The anticipated outcomes for children have been collated under two subheadings focusing on children's learnings about a) feelings and b) people and places, when responding to child safety matters.

4.1.1. Learning about safe and unsafe feelings

One week prior to the ACBS program was implemented at each centre, the educators held discussions with the children to ascertain their current understandings and perceptions about safety and fear. When asked about what makes them feel safe, the children typically referred to their parents and other family members, especially their grandparents (See Table 5). They also identified their homes and the centres as being safe places. Some children specifically identified educators or people at the preschool, whilst others referred to various objects such as flowers and their beds. Other children, spoke of doing things such as 'making cakes' as being joyful and actions such as 'holding hands' and not touching hot things as preventative measures against danger and harm. Following the program implementation, children's perceptions of proximity with parents and grandparents for safety were reinforced. Children's responses in Centre 2 indicate a close connection with the stories included in the ACBS program.

Table 5: What makes children feel safe?

Before ACBS	After ACBS
<p><u>Centre 1:</u> My family; mum; dad; nan; pop; preschool, the people at preschool.</p> <p><u>Centre 2:</u> Dad, mum, brothers, making cakes, fireworks, home, bed, flowers</p> <p><u>Centre 3:</u> Group 1: your dog, mum, dad, pa, poppy, nan/nanny, superheros, teachers</p> <p>Group 2: holding hands so no-one will run over you/so you can't let go, crawl when you see smoke, walking, you take care of children and don't let them touch hot things</p>	<p><u>Centre 1:</u> Being at home with dad; ice-cream; a hug; dancing and playing with friends; being with nan; rainbows</p> <p><u>Centre 2:</u> The mob; (what did the Joey do to feel safe again?) go in mum's pouch; (Who makes you feel safe?) mum, dad, teachers, sisters, nan and brothers (How do you know you are scared?) NOTE: This change in question is relevant in actually eliciting feelings such as "heart beats faster"; and "eyes looking/ wide open".</p> <p><u>Centre 3:</u> " Staying with my Nan. Staying with my big cousins or if it is a little one don't stay with them. My dad." " My mum and big sister and my cousin." "Staying with my big sister and if you are staying with a person you don't know, go and look for someone you do know." " Mummy and daddy." " When my mummy holds my hand when I cross the road so I don't get run'd over."" When my daddy loves me." "Daddy and mum." "Holding mummy and daddy's hand." "Holding mummy's hand and holding Daddy's hand."</p>

As indicated in Table 6 children's responses during these discussions, in relation to fear, were to provide a list of words of scary animals such as snakes, tigers, cockroaches and sharks, as well as imaginary creatures such as ghosts and monsters. Some children also referred to natural elements such as thunder and volcanos and others drew on personal experiences of scary events such as fireworks and scary dreams.

Following the ACBS program implementation, one week after the conclusion of the last module, the educators held another round of discussions with the children about things that made them feel scared. Their responses at this time indicate a change in the manner in which they responded.

As indicated in Table 6 the children's language and expression, reflect a more complex engagement in the discussion, beyond the use of single words to explain their feelings. That is, whilst the children continued to refer to scary animals (eg dingo) and people (eg ghosts), they extended the discussion to explain the potential signs of danger created when for example, they were not able to find their mum.

Indicators of danger were noted within family homes as well as outside in the community, when it is dark or when alone. During the program implementation at Centre 2, for instance, one child was able to express that his "nana and pop growl" at him and this did not make him feel good. Some children were also able to identify the potential of being hurt by someone and others attempted to articulate the importance of speaking to people about their fears.

Table 6: What makes children feel scared

Before ACBS	After ACBS
<p><u>Centre 1:</u> Ghosts, snakes, thunder</p> <p><u>Centre 2:</u> Warki or warki man or ghosts, witches, monsters, dragons, sharks, tigers, cockroaches; fireworks</p> <p><u>Centre 3:</u> Group1: a dingo; a gas bottle that erupts up in the sky; a volcano because of fire; crocodiles and a fox; very scary dreams in the night; Swat Fire on Ben Tennyson</p> <p>Group 2: monsters, scary dream, when you wake up and mummy and daddy are not there, mummy and brother.</p>	<p><u>Centre 1:</u> When I'm sick. Warki (Ghosts), When I can't find mum. I never feel scared.</p> <p><u>Centre 2:</u> Dingo. When someone's in your room and they hurt you. Bogeyman is in your room. Aunty, what about when we can talk to people and tell them about something scary? I felt unsafe when I went out in the dark; on the road; in the bush; at the park (why?) cos naughty people could hide; bad people might kidnap you – Aunty, what if you wander off on your own?.</p> <p><u>Centre 3:</u> " When I get lost and someone is not looking for me I phone the police and I will ask them if they can help me. When I do wheelies on mine and Tony's Peewee 50." " A dingo. When I feel like I am going to fall off my bike." " When I have scary dreams and when I am falling off a swing and have no seat belt on." "Scared by a monster, but I don't like good dreams, I like bad dreams, cause monsters make me feel happy. The monster is a bear, I love him." " When I'm sleeping I have a bad dream and it makes me scared." " When the lights cut off." "Snakes "When it's night time and the light's are off. "When something happens. When I'm busted."</p>

The children were capable of identifying what or who makes them feel safe secure and supported. Their responses related more to people and things rather than feelings and how your body can tell you that something is wrong. This is due to the wording of the question as well as the need for children to have the language to talk about changes in their body and related feelings.

Following the program implementation, which at Centre 2 included talking about bodily sensations, when the educator altered the question to "how do you know you are scared?" children were able to identify safe and unsafe feelings, such as eyes wide open and fast heart beat.

The use of props, such as emotion paddles and books about different emotions, during program implementation at all centres, further supported children to identify different feelings and what made them feel in a particular way. Educators recorded their comments at the end of each session. One child at Centre 3 for example, mentioned that he feels angry when he gets teased. At Centre 1 children talked about feeling happy in regard to being safe and also gave examples of safe feelings, including an excited tummy and feeling warm.

4.1.2. Learning involving safe people and places

In the event that children felt scared or unsafe, they were asked to explain what they would do, and who and where they would go to, to feel safe. These responses are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Keeping safe - places and people

Before ACBS	After ACBS
<p><u>Centre 1:</u> Run home, or run to dad's, nan's, pop or the "mish" (The mission); <i>Hide under a table, tell mum; (go to) Nan's, Aunty's, in my bed, to preschool.</i></p> <p><u>Centre 2:</u> Kill them, get dad to kill them; hide under blankets; hide in bush; sleep with brothers; turn the light on; run to mum and dad; hide, ring the police/coppers; go and get sad; watch a movie; Go to sleep with mummy; go to bed; my place; go to Port; go that way; run away; Big W; lock the fence; Aunty's place; motorbikes; cubbyhouse.</p> <p><u>Centre 3:</u> Group 1: go to mum; if there's a fire you stop down low; drop down low, roll and get that fire out; go to your house and nan's; go to your cousins; your pop's; your nan's; your sister's; aunty; police Group 2: go to mum and dad's bedroom; go to the forest; go and sleep in the bedroom; stay with mummy and daddy; , your grandpa, nana, somewhere safe, on dad's bus.</p>	<p><u>Centre 1:</u> Go to my room; get into bed with dad; hide in a cupboard; tell mum; feel sad; hide and cry for mum; hide under a table; go in the bush.</p> <p><u>Centre 2:</u> Go in the house; sleep in my room; tell mum and dad; tell my dad if there's a dangerous thing; ell mum; run home; lock my room; tell sister; teacher; nan; pop; out house; my room at home; yeah with teachers;</p> <p><u>Centre 3:</u> Call the police, ring a fireman, call 000; put the light back on; run away; go to dad and mum; my sister and brother; go in my bedroom. "If your friend lives next door, I would go there and stay the night."</p>

Table 8: People identified by children as being safe

People identified	C1	C2	C3
Mum	✓	✓	✓
Dad	✓	✓	✓
Nan	✓	✓	✓
Pop	✓	✓	✓
Sister(s)	✓	✓	✓
Brother(s)	✓	✓	✓
Cousin	✓		✓
Friend(s)	✓	✓	
Babysitter			✓
Aunty/Teacher	✓	✓	✓
Police	✓	✓	✓
The mob/ my family	✓	✓	
Fire-fighter			✓
Ambulance		✓	✓
Nurse	✓	✓	
Doctor	✓		

At every centre, there were children who consistently identified their parents, grandparents, sisters and brothers as well as centre staff as representing safe people. The police were the other external agency identified as being a safe reference point by children in all three centres. Safe places identified by children also related to these people (eg. nan's, home, police). Within the recorded responses provided by the educators, we were able to locate references to cousins and a babysitter only in the data from Centre 3. Likewise, references to friends and family or the mob collectively, were located in data provided from Centre 1 and 2.

There was little or no variation in terms of who the children identified as safe people before and after the ACBS Program was implemented in Centre 2 in particular. However, the staff who implemented the ACBS program also noted that at Centre 1, prior to the implementation of the ACBS program, the children found it difficult to grasp the meaning of the words safe and unsafe. The staff used the word 'scared' together with body language, to clarify the meaning of some of the pre-program questions at this centre. Subsequently, when the questions were modified to ask the children 'who will help you or stop you from getting hurt?' these children also identified a comprehensive list including both family and community members such as doctors, nurses as well as friends.

The children readily identified people who keep them safe and who can help them. These responses indicate that, in relation to learning about belonging, the children already had a good sense of this in relation to family. This understanding was strengthened during the ACBS program implementation, particularly in terms of incorporating a sense of belonging to both community as well as family.

Through the program and learning about being safe and unsafe, developing language to better communicate and understand a sense of belonging, children were also seen to develop more empathy, to interact in relation to others with care, and respect. Educators'

observations of children's interactions and responses during and after the ACBS program highlight a change in this aspect (see Table 9). Reflective comments by educators also further confirm children's developing communication skills and confidence at this time. The educator at Centre 1 was particularly pleased and impressed by the fact that the program allowed the children to "talk up". She also felt strongly that having given children a voice we now need to listen to them. Likewise, the educator at Centre 2 explained that there were lots of children with emotional needs and otitis at her centre and this could impact on children's ability to talk/express ideas. She emphasised "there needs to be a holistic approach; integrated into daily routines" and this could be reflected in asking questions such as "how do you feel today?" Such comments not only demonstrate the importance of the educator's knowledge of local contexts, especially in terms of the children's wellbeing and factors impacting on their learning.

Table 9: Children interact with empathy

Have you noticed any changes in children's behaviours and/or attitudes that can be linked with the ACBS program in some way?		
Centre 1	Centre 2	Centre 3
<p>"More nurturing, particularly of younger children in the yard"</p> <p>"Other children are now more confident to talk up, say 'no' to more aggressive children".</p>	<p>Children now have the words, a voice, rather than hitting out.</p> <p>Children got the feeling of being safe, reflect on incidents back to animal: I'm a kookaburra, I'm communicating with you.</p> <p>Children all sit together in a mob – social/sports (culturally appropriate).</p> <p>Two boys with issues particularly related to absorbed ideas, related to being a dingo at times; talked later about what he did (hide in cupboard) as not safe. Fire drill – kids would say "safe place".</p>	<p>Children expressed feelings better, understanding of the concept of different feelings - everyone feels differently about things. It's ok to feel scared or angry; there are different ways of dealing with that. Showing empathy. Having the confidence to speak to an adult.</p>

During the post-program implementation discussions, the children were also asked to indicate what they had learnt from the ACBS program, and these data are presented in Table 10. In documenting these comments, the educator in Centre 3 stated "I think the post-evaluation questions need to be reviewed as my group didn't really answer in detail to match their knowledge. It needs to be clear for all in this section if children can be prompted." These comments highlight the importance of having educators with appropriate expertise in working with pre-schoolers directing the implementation of the ACBS program. In this way, teaching can be better targeted and children's learnings can be more meaningful.

Table 10: Learnings from the ACBS program as perceived by the children

Centre 1	Centre 2	Centre 3
<p>(The question was reworded: what things do you remember from the bush animals in the story?) Kangaroo told dingo to go away in loud voice; echidna had spikes and rolls up in a ball to stab dingo; snakes go in their hole to feel safe; birds have wings and got away to be safe.</p> <p>Birds fly a long way, flap their wings, have feathers, helped the animals, are higher than dingo, they're safe.</p> <p>Koalas have fur, live up in trees, this is their happy place, they are safe.</p> <p>They were sad, they got happy, they got better</p>	<p>"Kangaroos were safe." "Koalas, kookaburras, king parrot, echidna, dingo, baby joey, they're all in a mob." "They felt sad because of the dingo." The babies getting hurt and the baby koala got bitten cause she ran down the tree, she wanted to get the other gum leaves, her mother told her 'no' and to stay in the tree, she didn't listen to her mum, she felt afraid cause she thought her mum would smack her. She told her mum, she felt good after that. Her mum took her to the doctor's to get a stitch, the baby told the doctor." "dingo was unsafe" "the kookaburra felt safe he warned dingo was there". " The koala climbed down, he wasn't listening to his mum he was unsafe cause the dingo bit her and he got bleeding, the mum was angry and she wouldn't climb down ever again, the mum felt sad.</p>	<p>"I remember the echidna and the king parrot and the baby king parrot." " I know, I remember the koala too." "and the kookaburra too." "Echidna, dingo and the aunties and the king parrots and the kookaburras." "When the galahs went to have the party and the dingo wasn't invited and he couldn't eat the babies." "When the echidna told her baby she's not safe."</p>

4.1.3 An unexpected learning

One of the preschool teachers, with agreement from the ACBS coordinator, used the ACBS puppets with a three year old called TJ. The teacher had wanted to use the puppets with TJ to support him with "language and communication skills regarding the increase in his aggressive behaviour." The teacher had "spent quality time with him" using the puppets and reported that TJ now responds positively to 1:1 interactions with adults and children. The ACBS coordinator reported "it was very rewarding for the teacher when TJ drew a happy face." Given below is an extract of an observation note documented by the teacher involving TJ.

TJ's story

26/8/11

He arrived at school with his toy transformer called Bumble bee and sat with me in the cubby house. "Aunty Shirley will you play?" and he thought for a bit before he said "you can be sister". I said "yes" and he said "I will be Dad". TJ then said "who will be Mum?" and he asked Aunty Donna, who said "yes". He told Mum to go and sit in the lounge while he cooked tea, and also any child that wanted to play, had to sit in the lounge to wait for tea.

I (SK) asked Dad (TJ) if he wanted me to go to the shop. He said "yes". I said "do you want bread and milk?"; he said "yes". He then made me stand in front of him and Dad (TJ) proceeded to button my cardigan up before he let me go to the shop.

This type of play went on all morning. He fussed over everyone and if they were crying or feeling sick he would say "take them home". I found that because he made me sister (SK) I had to listen to him and do what said all morning. He was calm and very thoughtful and his voice stayed soft and caring. This made me respond to TJ very differently to how we normally interact.

In all my experiences of childcare, this was the first time I totally became the character and allowed the child to direct and totally control the play. He was so caring and kind and used a gentle voice and watched over us all. The other children would call me Nan or Aunty Shirl, but I would say "No, I'm sister." They would smile at me and then call me "sister".

This child, TJ, was not formally part of the preschool group that was involved in the ACBS program at this centre. Use of the ACBS puppets with an individual child with language and emotional needs demonstrated an unexpected learning that benefited an individual child in the first instance. This case also highlights the potential benefits of using the ACBS resources in different ways with individual children in guiding their emotional or behaviour needs.

4.2. OUTCOMES FOR EDUCATORS

Anticipated outcomes for educators focus on their understanding of relevant child protection legislation, their ability to implement the ACBS program with preschool children, their capacity to involve families in the ACBS program, and their perspectives on the future of the ACBS program. Data for these

outcomes was collected through written responses to a child protection questionnaire and both pre program and post program questionnaires, as well as participation in discussions with the evaluators prior to implementation and at the Community Gathering held in 2011.

4.2.1. Sound knowledge and best practice in relation to child protection legislation as it impacts on educators

Prior to implementing the ACBS program it was important to ensure that educators were aware of child protection legislation and issues as they may relate to them in the workplace, in particular mandatory reporting requirements, and responding to a disclosure. Prior to the program being implemented, a brief child protection information session was therefore held with the educators, followed by a questionnaire for them to complete. One of the educators was unable to attend and her questionnaire was completed later with the support of the Program Coordinator. During discussion, each educator was also asked about her participation in more formal up-to-date child protection training, and all educators had attended a formal training session sometime ago prior to 2011.

In terms of participation in child protection training, early discussion with each educator provided the following information:

Centre 1: the educator felt that staff knew their role in child protection. She would appreciate having child protection training for them though – particularly on guiding children's behaviour – guidelines, policies, role with parents, and developing a team approach.

Centre 2: about half of the staff members at this centre had undertaken child protection training.

Centre 3: the educator had done child protection training some years ago, and the other staff at this centre had not done any.

Following a brief information session with the evaluators, educators were able to respond appropriately to more specific questions about their role in mandatory reporting of child protection matters as documented in Table 11..

Table 11: Educators' understanding of child protection legislation

Centre 1	Centre 2	Centre 3
<p>1. What are the 3 pieces of legislation that relate to child protection & what are the features of each?</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) ACT 1998. Responsibilities of Community Services, other agencies. Authorised carers, parents. Outlines ways of working with children, young people and families to remain at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young Children and Persons Act Mandatory Reporting Ombudsman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act – mandatory reporters guidelines, what happens when a report is made, the rights of a child, what happens if a child can not stay in care with their family, information about types of child abuse Prohibited persons declaration 3. Working with children check
<p>2. What are the grounds for reporting risk of significant harm?</p>		
<p>As soon as you see any sign that the child is not receiving "quality of care" from his/her carer.</p>	<p>Neglect Physical Sexual Domestic violence Pre-natal Psychological</p>	<p>If you suspect on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is at risk of being neglected or physically / sexually / emotionally abused If a child's basic needs are not being met – are not being properly fed, clothed or housed If a child's medical needs are not being met If there are signs of physical abuse If a child discloses information about abuse</p>
<p>3. How would you make a risk of significant harm judgement?</p>		
<p>Observation of child/parent. Questioning staff if they have a concern. What area of concern I would have.</p>	<p>Computerised reporting tree Phone</p>	<p>Use the online mandatory reporters guide to help guide decision making. ABC has a team we can ring if we need assistance with child protection issues. They help to guide staff with their concerns and also with the use of the mandatory reporters guide.</p>
<p>4. What actions are required when you suspect a child or young person is at risk of significant harm?</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report to the appropriate channels. All of the above in (No. 3) Child Protection office online (Mandatory report) Child Protection helpline 133627 Risk of significant harm report fax form. 	<p>Documentation Reporting tree</p>	<p>Call the Child Protection Helpline Ensure all concerns are documented when they occur</p>
<p>5. What do you do when risk is below significant threshold?</p>		
<p>Start documenting and collecting relevant information for evidence.</p>	<p>Referral to someone that can assist</p>	<p>Continue to monitor the situation and document any other concerns as they occur. Provide support and information to the family to assist them develop more knowledge in this area. So the family does not realise the focus is on them I often include relevant information in centre / room newsletters or handouts: complete cooking experiences, healthy eating experiences with the children; access posters, brochures from external services eg: RTA – appropriate car seats.</p>