

Contact Children's Mobile

Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Contact Children's Mobile (CCM) is an itinerant service paralleling in essence, the transient population served.

CCM service is not reliant on a facility or a building to operate, setting up the programs in the open air within each Homelands community in places where they feel safe and secure or relocate to different settings to support engagement within other programs or activities.

CCM is different from other approaches offered in the Utopia Homelands, as the early childhood team goes to the community, building a relationship with all the community members when they are on community and working within the context of the child, family and community reality. Learning on your own community Contact believes gives the community ownership over the sessions and the area that is set-up for the CCM team.

CCM actively engages with other service providers, building knowledge about things on community and, as relevant, assisting to build other service providers' knowledge as required, relating to children and families. It is not unusual for CCM to move to different sites within a regular Homelands community such as under a tree; at a community garden or offer programs in collaboration with others such as a Homelands school. Equally, it is not unusual for CCM to set-up programs with other agencies, upon request, to complement their actions. Contact believes it is important for families and the community to observe that agencies are working together, undertaking various roles that enhance rather than duplicate resources.

As a cost fiscal measure, the CCM service moves with the community wherever the people may be or if the children and families are not on community and, as feasible, to offer more sessions in other Homeland communities or commence exploring unmet needs within other Homelands communities that have limited or no access to early learning programs.

The Mobile service delivery model also recognises the barriers related to no public transport or access to reliable personal transportation on the Homelands. Therefore, CCM is able to come to the community and there is no expectation that children and families need to seek transport to access the early learning programs.

CCM conducts ongoing consultations with the communities about what times suits them best for the delivery of the CCM early learning and family programs including discussions relating to the school bus schedules to take the children to school, as CCM do not want to be a distraction or any reason for truancy.

Employment of local community members within CCM programs has been Contact's intention from inception. When first commencing within the Utopia Homelands, Contact consulted with key Urapuntja Corporation members about the staffing of CCM. The guideline given was that the community needed the best skilled people on the Mobile with early childhood qualifications and experience. As a result, CCM has employed suitably trained, highly qualified early childhood teachers.

Ultimately, Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation(UAC) also expressed however, as a long-term goal, that Contact and UAC identify potential community members that could be supported to eventually be skilled and take on the roles required to successfully deliver a high quality early childhood and family service within the community. To date, there has not been a success in identifying community members that may wish to take on such potentials.

Since inception, Contact has observed and canvassed the potential of such possibilities or casual employment. To date, no one has been identified from the Utopia Homelands that has expressed interest in full-time work with the Mobile and to date, casual work opportunities have been offered to relevant community members when they are on community.

Following the late October 2017 announcement from the Northern Territory Government Minister for Education supporting avenues for early childhood career pathways in the school setting, Contact instigated an initial discussion with Arlparra School and UAC in December 2107 to express interest in working in progressing such a potential including offering Contact's experiences in mentoring, tutoring and supporting rural and remote students achieve early childhood competency base skilling attainment.

Lessons Learned

The early childhood expertise of CCM staff enable them to consider the children who will be attending, plan suitable activities for the individual child and for the group of children to give the children experiences that will develop their overall skills and competencies and at all times, working towards successful transition to school. Within the mind of the CCM team is the desire to empower the adult participants that they too can continue the fun activities at home and continue their children's learning at many intervals during the day.

However, to achieve this goal, strong reciprocal relationships need to be developed.

Upon reflection, CCM has learned that it is relationships that are the key to the success of our work within the community and the positive trusted relationships that have been developed that has served the program well, being able to share good times, have a laugh at things and then to be able to reflect with the adults about the children's progression at activities.

One of the key lessons learned for CCM since commencing service delivery within the Homelands is to empower the community and ensure that programs are easily achieved within the resources available to families, thus further supporting the potential that the programs may continue within the families' context and realities. As a result, Contact does not enter the Homelands communities and offer the CCM programs utilising "big, bright, whizz bang" toys and equipment that are unrealistic for the families to access with their children. By sourcing resources that are found on community, the intention has been throughout to build skills and confidence of the adults so that they may continue to build upon the CCM programs when the service is not on community or the families are relocated to another area.

As a result, CCM has utilised a range of natural resources such as:

- Sticks to learn the concepts of over, under, beside (next to) etc;
- Leaves and rocks to measure big and little and count, stack;
- Sand to learn about heavy and light;
- The dirt to draw names, count.

Other observations include:

It is CCM experience that the Utopia Homelands adults want their children to be successful and do well at school.

CCM has observed that the adults on the Homelands have had few or no play opportunities previously and as such, also enjoy the learning experiences at the CCM sessions for themselves using some of the equipment to create, then with the adults growing confidence, guide the children in the activities.

Families and community members listen, are interested and take on board child development aspects and concepts when conveyed by the CCM team.

Ayawarra language is very hard to learn and the people CCM work with are fluent in three languages before English. Visual presentations have worked best, as a result, to assist in the delivery of CCM early learning and child development messages.

Children are universal; play is the unspoken tool to their success. Play is a child's right and CCM observe them delight in play - to explore, create and learn, just as any child does, in any quality early learning environment. Some children on community have amazing skills that could be nurtured into something great. CCM have seen one boy construct, deconstruct and continue until he had it right. To us this is the mind of a possible engineer, his ability to make his internal vision come to fruition. Another girl perhaps a future teacher or doctor has continued to demonstrate her ability in gaining concepts or solving problems and was quicker than many children the CCM professionals have worked with in a broad range of settings and circumstances.

There is real strength and ability within Utopia Homelands community and CCM have been privileged to have been a part.

