

INCLUSION PROGRAMS

Get Out of Town

Supporting disadvantaged families during tough times

The Get Out of Town program supports and strengthens disadvantaged families. Through a range of activities, mostly run during school holiday periods, the program gives children and their families the chance to reduce isolation and build community connection and resilience, and provides pathways into further support.

In the 2019-20 financial year, the GOOT program has been a vital lifeline for families in need. 60 separate families have accessed our services in this period, including 109 children. Our data shows that 8% of families accessing our service have Australian Indigenous background; a further 76% of families are from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background, and 16% are non-CALD families.

In the second half of 2019, GOOT ran six activities for children and families. Then, with the onset of the pandemic and related restrictions in mid-March 2020, GOOT undertook a consultation with participants, assessing their needs together with what would be possible under COVID-safe guidelines. In response to these needs and parameters, GOOT designed and implemented twelve online family activities between February and July 2020, programs which responded to the stated needs of families.

The revised GOOT COVID-Safe program included:

1. One on one case management support and referrals. During the first half of 2020, GOOT undertook more traditional social work-style case-management and family support, with over 1700 support contacts delivered online or via phone during the period. Families raised many issues that impacted on them, including social isolation, depression, anxiety, overcrowding, poverty, child protection issues, lack of understanding about the pandemic and the restrictions.
2. Identifying core presenting issues and needs and developing plans of support and referral, including the design of new programs (detailed below).
3. Facilitating access to brokerage funds to enable families facing financial hardship to purchase computers and internet packages, which are vital for online learning and connections when in isolation.
4. Linking families into a range of supports as needed. GOOT staff have referred families to the following supports and services: mental health case management, family violence services, counselling services, dental services, drug and alcohol services, housing support services, brokerage funds, emergency food support, financial advice, the VOSS communications course, the Applied Reception and Customer Service course, and creative writing programs.

As per point 2 above, and in response to family needs, GOOT designed new activities to assist families during this time. We developed:

- **Art Connect for Families**, a series of online art and craft workshops designed specifically for disadvantaged GOOT families stuck at home during the lockdown restrictions. These workshops were facilitated by a trained artist and were well attended. They provided children and their carers with an opportunity to create beautiful things with everyday materials and to

connect with one another, decreasing isolation and increasing well-being during this difficult time.

- **GOOT Connect Facebook Page**, an online space where families can find information and connect with one another.
- **COVID-safe Outdoor Family Activities**, including treasure hunts in different local areas.
- **Health, Food and Hygiene Parcels**. Parcels were created for all GOOT families and included reusable cloth masks and hand sanitiser. 100% of families are using the packs and finding them useful.
- **COVID-19 Information**. During the pandemic, the GOOT program has regularly shared information with service users via email and Facebook, including multi-language health information about COVID-19 from the Department of Health and Human Services.

In 2019-20 the Get Out Of Town program has provided vital support to vulnerable families, helping them to access the supports they need during this most challenging of times.