St. Paul’s School Community Partnerships
Who? - School Community

- Catholic Primary School for 40 years
- Seeks to educate in creative, flexible and future oriented ways
- High proportion of support staff
- High proportion of families with limited financial resources
- Provide books, uniforms, food to students in need including those who attend from domestic violence shelter and from a refugee background
- Lifelong learning culture that addresses social and emotional needs that arise through trauma, separation and loss
- Views literacy in very broad terms, ensuring meaningful learning takes place for a diverse group of students.
School Staff include:

- Principal
- Assistant Principal Religious Education
- Curriculum Support Teacher
- Literacy Enrichment Teacher
- 1 full time ESL teacher
- 1 part time ESL teacher (4 days)
- Bilingual school officer (12 hours)
- STIE (4 days)
- Inclusion teacher (3 days)
- Pastoral Care Worker (3 days)
- 10 classroom teachers (P-7)
- 10 school officers
- Community Development Worker
- School Cultural Development Worker
Who? - Student Community

- 256 students
- Student diversity - 68% of NESB
- 20% of school population from African countries
- 23 cultures
- 26 main languages spoken at home - Main language groups are Samoan, Tongan, Arabic and Kirundi
- 10% of school population are indigenous Australians
- High number of students with disabilities and learning difficulties
- Out-of-Home students - 18%
- Marginalised students - 53%
- Disengaged students - 27%

(Dethlefs, 2004)
Family related issues identified in the St. Paul's School Community Partnerships report included:
- poverty,
- family isolation,
- a limited understanding of and capacity to access professional and support services,
- a distrust of government agencies,
- family isolation and disengagement from culturally appropriate communities and groups,
- differing family values relating to discipline and 'shame',
- various health issues,
- family violence,
- frequent student lateness and absenteeism (Ryan, 2005 pp. 18-20)

"First, a worker must overcome his/her own socialisation within institutions that accept and reinforce the top-down approach, including the family, the education system, the workplace and the helping professions" (Ife 2002, pp. 117 - 118).
Who? - Family Community

- Unique community of difference
- Culturally diverse and rich - 68% have English as a second language
- Over 23 nationalities represented
- Large indigenous numbers
- Value oral tradition and literacy

“First, a worker must overcome his/her own socialisation within institutions that accept and reinforce the top-down approach, including the family, the education system, the workplace and the helping professions” (Ife 2002, pp. 117 - 118).
How it came about?

1. Research showed that there were alarming statistics regarding student disengagement and marginalisation and out of home experiences.

2. A planning and evaluation process by Brisbane Catholic Education, Griffith University and school community which highlighted the need to form meaningful partnerships with the community to best support students and their families.

3. As a result, in 2006 ‘St. Paul’s School Community Partnerships’ was implemented as a lighthouse project employing a Community Development Worker and School Cultural Development Worker.

4. In 2008 a review and external evaluation by Griffith University recommended the project continue as a program embedded within the school for a further 5 years.
Who is Involved?

Partnership between school staff, students, families and local community facilitated by the Community Development Worker and School Cultural Development Worker.

Community Development Worker: To intentionally foster a sense of community within the school and to develop the school’s role within the local community. The work is based on building respectful and reciprocal relationships.

School Cultural Development Worker: FOCUS: To enhance and contextualise student learning within their physical and social environment and to engage diverse learners in schooling.

STRATEGY: To identify, validate and utilise cultural phenomena* as a means to enter into holistic and engaging learning experiences assisting students to develop their individual and collective identity.

*Cultural phenomena are manifestations of our symbolic understandings, values and social patterns. E.g., The arts, communication media and skills, trends, rituals, interests
How does it support students?

At St. Paul’s School, we understand that for students to be supported in their schooling; their environment (or ecosystem - home, family, community, school etc.) needs to be supported, which will assist their successful development, learning and experience of education.

Some examples of this include:
Family engagement activities and strategies: Community days, Community Garden, Harmony day celebration, English Lessons, Playgroup, Dad ‘n’ Kids Day, Community Centre, ‘open door’ policy for family & community access.

Partnerships with local community:
St. Vincent De Paul, PC Friends (computer club), YFS (family support), local community groups, Playgroups QLD etc...

Advocacy and support with families and ‘those who are oppressed’ or ‘on the margins’ of society.
What about learning?

Community Partnerships works with teachers in creating various learning opportunities to assist students who find it difficult to engage with the regular curriculum and to demonstrate learning:

**Individual**

**Alfio** – Google Earth – The power of sharing story

**Robert** – Tongan Gardening: sharing knowledge & language development

**Small Group**

**Animation** – utilise strengths of creativity, imagination & humour

**Film** – Indigenous Students – sharing understandings of heritage

**Whole Class**

**Images** – discovering & utilising visual & sensory language

**Community Food Garden** – participating, and understanding our role within ecosystems
Learning - Health - Well-being

Community Processes
- Reciprocal relationships
- Celebrating difference
- Shared ownership
- Engagement & connection
- Shared space & place

Human Agency

Community
School
Families
Students

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS PROCESS MODEL
Where do I sit?

The ESL teachers utilise this partnership through:

- Collaborative planning for learning and teaching
- Liaison for strategic support during family crises
- Being a link between families and community workers
- Collaborative support of student learning through individual and small group work
- Planning with classroom teachers to facilitate community links
- Providing a teaching perspective in contextual learning activities
- Informing teaching and learning from a language learning perspective.
How has it supported ESL?

- One example in 2008 was a cooking program supported by the school community partnership by funding a parent in the school who organised, purchased, collected food donations from local businesses and practical teaching of cooking skills.
- Purpose to support 10 new arrival refugee children from Africa who were experiencing trauma and difficulty
- learning school, social and life skills.
- Weekly cooking and nutrition classes
- A focus on sharing, turn taking, waiting, using unfamiliar ingredients and utensils, nutrition, eating with others and links between oral and written language.
- Culminating activity was a trip to a restaurant for lunch.
Benefits

Benefits of this approach for St. Paul's:

- Given time to experience, understand and learn
- Learnt English in a meaningful context
- Better relationships with others
- Increased students' engagement with learning
- Improved emotional well being
- Better socialisation and behavioural outcomes in classroom and playground
- Improved learning in mainstream classroom
- Increased parent and carer participation
- Community Benefit - parent establishing her own restaurant supported by school and local community
- A shared approach lightens the load physically and emotionally.
Our Shared Community