DSS- NATIONAL FAMILIES WEEK 2019

So what makes families important?

Families are the people who shape us to be the adults we become, more than the other vital influences in our lives.

The best of families give us the foundation to become people with the capacity to deal with whatever life throws at us as adults- and that includes knowing how to seek help.

Growing up in troubled families can permanently diminish our lives and it is because of our recognition of this that our work and planning in so many fields is already being influenced by the "Social Determinants of Health".

At the end of last century, in the 1990s a sentinel study was carried out in USA.

The ACE study-(Adverse Childhood Events) surveyed people who were managing well enough to have health insurance in a country where this is a privilege not an expectation. So not recognised disadvantaged people.

The study was a simple count of the number of adverse childhood events recorded measured against current health status.

The results paint a stark picture of the distressing health and disease legacy of troubled childhoods and suggests strongly that we should be doing much more from pregnancy and early childhood to stop the progression to these grim outcomes.

How can we effectively nurture families?

It is generally agreed that all of our lives now are more demanding and stressful than in the past.

We so often ignore or forget we are social animals who need to rely on each other for our survival

Knowing others care enough to be there for us is vital from infancy throughout our lives.

It is easier to forget this when so many of our essentials for survival are now provided in an impersonal way

Daily survival without recourse to the internet is becoming increasingly difficult. However, even impersonal needs, like paying bills and making appointments, dealt with this way can cause so much more stress and frustration in our lives. And then there is dealing with complaints on line!

It is dangerous to recall a rosier past, especially as a "Senior Person" but my Tasmanian holiday earlier this year did jolt my thinking. Because of the bushfires, I had an unplanned day at a quiet beach on Lake Pedder. There was a family there with a tribe of young boys, all totally focused on a wild day in the water with their plastic canoes. Their families watched placidly from the beach. When they finally packed up, I commended one dad for enabling the kids to have such a wonderful day. He was relieved I approved. He had been concerned that the considerable noise might have bothered us. A sad reflection on modern expectations of children?

It is this sort of free, adventurous risk taking play that helps kids learn their strengths and capabilities.

But how many of our children now can have such experiences regularly, or ever?

Why must we keep complicating these events- bigger, better, brighter rather than simple, focusing on mutual delight?

How curious are we about our children's daily lives and experiences? How many assumptions do we make that a physically pleasant and safe environment is a good place for a child to be day in, day out, for as many as 50 weeks a year? What opportunities are there for the child, or infant to be recognised as needing some extra help and understanding as happens almost instinctively in a caring family with almost confident emotional communication?

Does it matter? Do we know enough to make that judgement?

To help our families we need to spend more times being curious and reflective about our daily lives, and the lives we impose on others, in order to work towards happier, healthier communities throughout Australia.

Even chance, incidental encounters- a chance smile and sympathetic eye contact from a stranger, or even the proverbial "cup of tea" can help us feel so much better almost instantly. Can we build more of these boosts into our lives to counter the stresses?

I have a NAPCAN poster painted by an Indigenous artist, depicting a family, with sacred child, being supported by their community- and with that community supported by neighbouring communities.

If any harm befalls this child, the burden of responsibility is shared by all community members, wondering what else they could have done. How can we help our society move to accept a collective responsibility for the wellbeing of all families?