

Improving wellbeing: case study

Act-Belong-Commit Orange

June 2017

Whole-of-community wellbeing promotion campaign

When staff at the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) wanted to improve the wellbeing of their clients in the central west NSW town of Orange, they turned to three little words for help: Act-Belong-Commit.

That is the catchphrase of a mental health promotion campaign that began as a small pilot program in Western Australia in 2005, and has since gone on to be implemented in places as far flung as Denmark and Japan.

Act-Belong-Commit originated from research conducted by Curtin University and encourages people to adopt behaviours that will protect and promote their mental health:

- **Act** - keep physically, socially and mentally active;
- **Belong** - keep connected with family and friends and get involved in groups or local community activities;
- **Commit** - commit to an interest or cause, such as volunteering, learning a new skill, or challenge yourself and set goals to achieve a commitment.

In May 2015, FACS enlisted the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (CRRMH) to roll out Act-Belong-Commit in Orange, where the Centre's offices are based. FACS provided funding for a initially called 'Mentally Healthy Orange', but now named Act-Belong-Commit Orange.

"The goal of Act-Belong-Commit Orange is to use this proven model to improve the wellbeing

ACT

Keep mentally, physically and socially active: take a walk, say g'day, read a book, do a crossword, dance, play cards, stop for a chat...

BELONG

Join a book club, take a cooking class, be more involved in groups you are already a member of, go along to community events...

COMMIT

Take up a cause, help a neighbour, learn something new, set yourself a challenge, help out at the school or meals on wheels...

of vulnerable community members, particularly those living in supported housing, and to lift the wellbeing of everyone around them," says Victoria Smyth, senior project officer at CRRMH.

"We want to inform people of simple things they can do to improve their lives, and to change the language we use so there is less talk about mental illness and more talk about mental health."

CRRMH's first task was to establish a Steering Committee to advise on the needs of the community and the barriers and enablers to rolling out the campaign; to establish partnerships with organisations that could help them deliver

the campaign; and to build community awareness of the Act-Belong-Commit idea.

“Getting people to start something new or change their behaviour requires the support of not only the local frontline mental health services, but also community organisations, schools, government bodies and businesses, so we can reach people from all parts of the community in the places they interact. It’s a whole-of-community effort,” Victoria says.

After six months of ground work, CRRMH publicly launched Act-Belong-Commit Orange on 27 November 2015.

“Dozens of organisations came to the local park and showcased activities that community members could get involved with as part of Act-Belong-Commit. We had everything from cycling advice workshops to permaculture gardening tips to a reading group. The benefit for organisations was that they were getting new members or customers. Our evaluation indicates that, all up, there were about 50 really meaningful conversations had that day about activities that could improve wellbeing.”

Throughout 2016, achievements of the campaign included the development of a ‘Creating Mentally Healthy Workplace’ toolkit by CRRMH staff, detailing how organisations could implement Act-Belong-Commit. The members of the Steering Committee committed to rolling it out within their workplaces, to improve the wellbeing of their staff and lead behaviour change. Act-Belong-Commit Orange also became a standing agenda item on the Orange City Council’s Community and Youth Interagency meetings, ensuring wellbeing stayed top of mind in all planning.

Within the community, 750 community members took part in a Winter Walk 4 Wellbeing challenge and over 300 people signed up to follow the campaign’s daily tips on Facebook. A local news magazine and radio station ran a regular Act-

Belong-Commit segment during October for Mental Health Month.

Act-Belong-Commit project officer, Courtney Bilske, says collaboration has been crucial to these achievements.

“No one organisation can transform a community’s wellbeing, it’s too big a task. We’ve known this from the beginning and, on the advice of FACS, have used a Collective Impact approach to deliver the Act-Belong-Commit Orange campaign. It means we have brought key players together so there is a common agenda, complementary activities and ongoing communication,” Courtney says.

By the end of 2016, 13 organisations had signed on as partners of Act-Belong-Commit Orange, including the Western NSW Local Health District, the Orange Community Training and Education Centre, Department of Education and Training and the Central West Volunteer Centre.

“A key piece of feedback from our partners has been that having a ‘backbone organisation’ such as CRRMH driving all activity is vital,” says Courtney.

The next hurdles for the campaign are securing ongoing funding and finding ambassadors to help take the Act-Belong-Commit message to specific audiences such as Aboriginal people and young people.

“Our evaluation is ongoing, but what would really have a positive impact is more people at local events, more participation in local causes, and more talk about promoting good mental health and wellbeing,” says Courtney.

