



“HAVE CAPE, WILL TRAVEL”

An evaluation of Starlight’s Healthier Futures Initiative in the Northern Territory

Healthier Futures Initiative: To improve the well-being of children and young people by enhancing the primary health care experience and encouraging healthy living through entertainment and play.

BACKGROUND

In 2006 the Starlight Children’s Foundation introduced its Healthier Futures Initiative to the Northern Territory (NT). The professional costumed performers, known as Captain Starlight, work in partnership with health care professionals to provide distraction, entertainment, play, and creativity during clinic visits and hospital stays, and deliver positive healthcare education to children utilising NT health care services. Based in Darwin, the program is provided five days per week at the Royal Darwin Hospital as well as to community outreach clinics across the Northern Territory. In 2008 Starlight engaged the services of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) – predecessor to the Lowitja Institute – to evaluate the impact of the NT Healthier Futures Initiative.¹

¹ Harrison N, Walker D. Evaluation of the Starlight Children’s Foundation’s activities in regional and remote communities of the Northern Territory. Darwin: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2008.



AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation sought to determine both the acceptability and impact of the Healthier Futures Initiative in the NT. In addition, suggestions for improving the program were explored. This snapshot provides a summary of the findings.

WHAT WAS INVOLVED?

Data was obtained through:

- Analysis of program records.
- Semi-structured interviews with health professionals in community health centres, hospitals, and child-care centres; staff employed as Captain Starlight; and other key stakeholders, including school and preschool staff, parents, and community members.
- Observations of the Captain Starlights' performances, activities, and interactions with participating children and their families.

Using an action research model, the evaluators regularly fed back findings and observations from the field visits to the Captain Starlights and their managers. This feedback provided opportunities for clarification, discussion, and improvements to the program.

Captain Starlight

- Is recognised and highly valued among children, families, and health professionals in the NT;
- Provides much needed entertainment and play activities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- Supports health professionals by reducing the fear, anxiety and boredom children often experience during medical procedures and health checks;
- Enhances the effectiveness of health promotion programs through entertainment and play;
- Encourages attendance at health clinics.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The findings fell into three categories:

1. Recognition and Acceptability;
2. Impact; and
3. Recommendations.

Recognition and Acceptability

Overall the evaluation found that Captain Starlight was:

- Recognised by staff, parents, and children;
- Regarded as highly skilled, professional in their interactions, self-sufficient, and non-intrusive;
- Appreciated for their willingness and flexibility in providing support to community initiated activities;
- Able to provide activities that were fun; and
- Provided important play activities for children who often have had little exposure to this type of entertainment and distraction.

“...it gives them exposure to live theatre, live performances...I think the bush kids probably really miss those sorts of experiences...It's good role modelling for nurses and doctors to see this kind of thing because play often gets left out of things, but we know it improves health.”

—Child Care Director





Recommendations

Recommendations included:

- The promotion of, and continuation of regular visits to hospitals and centres;
- Building the Captain Starlight program into school, preschool, and child care health promotion programs;
- Expanding Captain Starlight visits to additional communities; and
- The recruitment of Indigenous Captain Starlights.

HOW DID WE USE THE EVALUATION?

Since the evaluation Starlight has significantly expanded its Healthier Futures Initiative in the NT through increasing hospital visits and being active at numerous rural and remote community health centres, at Healthy School-Aged Kids screening clinics, and health and community events and festivals. In addition, the program is being piloted, in collaboration with the NT Government, at Paediatric Multidisciplinary Clinics. With a permanent and respected presence in the NT, the Healthier Futures Initiative continues to be promoted and recommended by numerous health agencies.

Impact

Health professionals identified a number of positive impacts. These included:

- Improved attendance at clinics;
- Parents and children staying longer at clinics;
- Easier management of clinics;
- The creation of a more welcoming environment which was less institutional and more family-centred; and
- Support of existing health promotion programs.

“We sent the Captain Starlights to the Health Department in Darwin to learn a bit about what they were doing. And they came back with these songs that they’d made up with a little ukulele about ‘We get measured, we get weighed’...absolutely fantastic... When we did the preschool screening, the kids were fighting over whose turn it was, and they were coming down the hallway singing what Captain Starlight had taught them...It makes our job easier if the kids aren’t terrified.”

—Health Centre Manager

“Captain Starlight has been an awesome asset during HSAK (Healthy School-Age Kids Program) rising from 50% of the children being screened in the community in 2011, to 80% in 2012.”

—Remote Child Health Nurse

The findings of this evaluation, including updated program information, have been presented at the Rural Health Conference, 2011, 2013 – Cairns/Adelaide, and the Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health Conference, 2013.

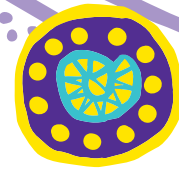


Healthier
Futures
Initiative



Starlight
children's foundation

RESEARCH & EVALUATION SNAPSHOT



PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Short Term (1 – 6 visits)	Medium Term (7 – 12 visits)	Long (13+ visits)
Distraction during treatment and consultations increased	Positive mood, anticipation, 'in the moment', and reflection achieved	Positive reframing of having a serious or chronic illness and hospitalisation achieved
Access to entertainment, play and creativity increased	Self-expression and creativity enhanced	Self-esteem and self-confidence improved
Positive mood enhanced Stress and tension reduced	Attitude and beliefs about health care positively changed	Health care participation and treatment compliance increased
Attendance at health clinics increased	Early detection and management of chronic diseases improved	Improved health outcomes achieved
Awareness of healthy living strategies enhanced	Healthy living strategies are adopted	Prevention of chronic illnesses increased
Opportunities for arts activities and play in health services provided	Awareness of the positive impact of arts activities and play in health services increased	Inclusion of arts-based and play activities in the delivery of health services achieved
Family and community-based activities provided	Opportunities for family and community social interaction increased	Family and community well-being strengthened

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION AT STARLIGHT

Starlight is committed to research and evaluation so that we can ensure our programs are making a significant difference to the lives of seriously ill children, young people and their families. Captain Starlights are professional performers with backgrounds in music, acting, media, visual arts and comedy. If you would like to learn more about our work please email us at impact@starlight.org.au.

