

EVALUATION OF THE
KEEPING KIDS IN MIND
GROUP-WORK PROGRAM

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LIST OF SHORT FORMS

AGD	Attorney-General’s Department
FaHCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and the Arts
FDR	family dispute resolution
FRC	Family Relationships Centre
FSP	Family Support Program
KKIM	Keeping Kids In Mind
NGO	non-government organisation
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Keeping Kids in Mind” (KKIM) is a program for separated parents. It has operated in the Greater Sydney area since late 2008 and is run by a consortium of Catholic Social Welfare Agencies working in the non-government (NGO) sector. These agencies are CatholicCare Sydney, Centacare Parramatta, CatholicCare Wollongong and Centacare Broken Bay. These agencies offer a range of therapeutic, educational and family dispute-resolution services to couples and families experiencing conflict in separation.

KKIM incorporates a post-separation, psycho-educational group-work program of five weeks' duration. It is for separated parents in high-conflict situations and is designed to educate and increase parents' awareness of the impact of their conflict on children's psychological and emotional development, and to increase commitment to collaborative parenting.

In 2009 the consortium of Catholic Social Welfare Agencies delivering the KKIM group-work program contracted the University of Newcastle's Family Action Centre to undertake an evaluation of the program. The evaluation was part of a larger project which also incorporated professional publication of the group-work program materials, as well as further development of the KKIM Service Delivery and Clinical Case Management model.

A mixed-method evaluation was undertaken during which staff from the four agencies participated in two focus groups to explore the effectiveness and impact of KKIM. A survey for parent participants in KKIM regarding the effectiveness and impact of the program on their lives and those of their children was distributed through the three agencies¹ that had implemented the KKIM program. In order to maintain confidentiality, parents who chose to participate returned the surveys directly to the evaluators. Parents were also invited to participate in telephone interviews with an evaluator. The return rate of surveys was 19.27% (n = 22), and from this return group 11 parents were interviewed. Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel software and qualitative data were analysed using Nvivo 8 software. Survey answers and interviews were broken into broad themes associated with behaviour, knowledge and attitudes, as well as useful content and improvements related to the group-work program.

The results from both the staff focus groups and the parent surveys were consistent in their identification of the areas in which the KKIM group-work program had a positive impact on parents and children. The majority of parents either “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” that KKIM had:

- improved their knowledge of the impact that separation and divorce has children
- helped them learn to manage their own emotions better
- helped them learn to value the contribution of the other parent
- benefitted from improved parenting strategies and skill development

¹ At the time of writing, Centacare Broken Bay had not conducted the program.

The evaluation concluded that the content and process of the KKIM program is consistent with best practice and current research. Further, the results strongly suggest that:

1. attendance at KKIM has a positive impact on parents' abilities to manage the emotional turmoil which ensues from relationship breakdowns
2. that the new knowledge, improved skills and change in attitudes regarding the other parent and the co-parent relationship in the post-separation period are of benefit to both parent and child.

INTRODUCTION

“Keeping Kids in Mind” (KKIM) is a program for separated parents. It has operated in the Greater Sydney area since 2008 and is run by a consortium of Catholic Social Welfare Agencies working in the non-government (NGO) sector. These agencies are CatholicCare Sydney, Centacare Parramatta, CatholicCare Wollongong and Centacare Broken Bay. They offer a range of therapeutic, educational and family dispute-resolution services to couples and families experiencing conflict in separation.

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The KKIM project was conceptualised in 2005 by the four agencies, all of whom receive funding through the Family Support Program (FSP). FSP is jointly funded by the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department (AGD) and the Australian Government’s Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). The KKIM group-work program sits within the FSP services.

The initial concept of KKIM developed from the Family Law Court and the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia’s need for post-separation parenting programs and referral pathways for high-conflict separated couples with children. These cases were often referred to the agencies for family dispute resolution (FDR). Clients referred to the service were frequently unclear as to what to expect from a referral to FDR. Many were not ready to participate in FDR; some clients required a range of both counselling and therapeutic interventions to assist them to process their grief, loss, depression, anxiety and/or anger about the separation. It was felt that mothers and fathers would also benefit from a greater understanding of the impact of their conflict on their children’s social and psychological development.

The KKIM model consists of two parts:

1. A proposed service delivery model, which includes a referral pathway for court referrals, with a central 1800 number for all participating Centacare/CatholicCare agencies. This model incorporates a clinical case management approach for clients entering the service and a range of pathways for meeting client needs. The proposed clinical case management approach begins with a clinical assessment of client needs by a highly qualified clinician, the KKIM Case Manager. The KKIM Case Manager has specialist knowledge and skills in a range of areas including family law, child

development, adult and child mental health, domestic violence, couple and family therapy, and a sound knowledge of external community agencies and resources.

2. A three-hour, weekly psycho-educational group for a duration of five weeks for up to 12 participants focusing on the development of parental reflective functioning; that is, developing the parents' awareness about the impact of their behaviour upon their children and developing their ability to think and consider their children's wellbeing in their actions and communications with their ex-partners. These groups are already being delivered four times per annum by the participating agencies. Facilitator and participant manuals and Microsoft PowerPoint presentations have been developed for these groups.

The group-work program includes the use of a KKIM DVD, available with Arabic, Spanish and Vietnamese subtitles. The DVD is also used by CatholicCare's Family Dispute Resolution Service and the Bankstown Family Relationship Centre in their work with separating couples. Other Catholic social service agencies throughout NSW and Australia are also using this DVD in their Family Dispute Resolution Services and Family Relationship Centres. The DVD, through enacted real-life scenarios, aims to emotionally engage parents to assist them focus on the impacts of conflict on children and the importance of developing collaborative parenting arrangements post separation.

The expected benefits of the KKIM model include:

1. A higher proportion of parents and children presenting to the courts and other legal agencies experiencing enhanced psychological, emotional and social wellbeing through proper assessment, referral and case management.
2. A simplified and streamlined approach to court referrals for these clients.
3. A closer working relationship with the Family Law Court and the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia.
4. A higher proportion of separated and divorced parents involved in collaborative parenting and a reduction in ongoing acrimonious separations and divorces.
5. Better developmental outcomes for children of separated and divorced families through participation in the KKIM group.
6. For the Catholic agencies, KKIM represented a set of new products that had the potential to enhance the capability of the agencies.

It is anticipated by the group of Catholic agencies that the group-work component of the project, once formally evaluated and professionally published with related branding, will be marketed to other providers, with copyright to the Catholic agencies. This report presents the evaluation of the group-work program, including literature review, evaluation method, results and discussion.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE RELATED TO POST-SEPARATION PARENTING PROGRAMS

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of recent research into post-separation parenting programs. The review used a hierarchical approach in its methodology, firstly searching databases (such as JSTOR, Informat and Proquest) for high-quality, peer-reviewed journals; then searching evidence-based journals; and then publications from government departments. In providing an evidence base for post-parenting programs the focus was on credible research and independently evaluated studies and programs. While there are a number of agencies that have conducted post-separation parenting programs and have published the results of their evaluations, peer-reviewed evaluations were mainly used in this literature review. Where possible, appropriate literature from Australia was the focus but where there was a lack of research, papers from the United States were used.

In 2008 the crude rate of divorce (divorces per thousand of population) was 2.2. While this was a drop from 2.9 in 2001, almost half (48.8%) of divorces granted in 2008 were to couples with children aged under 18 years. This means that over 43,000 children were involved in divorces in 2008, with the average number of children per divorce being 1.88 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). In the two decades to 2010 there has been a growing recognition of the needs of children in separation and divorce and the increased risk factors that divorce has for emotional, social/behavioural and educational outcomes (Goodman, Bonds, Sandler, & Braver, 2004; Parkinson, 2006). While there may be negative outcomes for individuals from separation and divorce the majority of children do adjust well to the changes in their lives (Kelly & Emery, 2003). One of the most significant factors in children's adjustment is the nature of their parents' responses to the emotional turmoil of separation and divorce. Further, extensive research indicates there is a significantly increased risk of negative outcomes for children where there is ongoing conflict between the parents (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004; Goodman et al., 2004; McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003; McKenry, Clark, & Stone, 1999; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). While the processes of separation and divorce are clearly stressful and distressing for both adults and children, recognition of the impact on children and moves to place their needs at the centre of the process are relatively recent.

RECENT CHANGES IN AUSTRALIAN LAW

The Commonwealth *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006*, represents a move by the Australian Government to focus more on children's wellbeing during the post-separation period and reflects increasing research which indicates that better long-term outcomes can be achieved through children's healthy and positive adjustment to their new family situation (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004; McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003). The move to place greater emphasis on the wellbeing of children during the process of separation and divorce through improvements in processes and support services for parents and families is also recognition of the paradoxes that exist during the emotional turmoil of separation and divorce; namely, that the emotional upheaval

and trauma experienced by adults during separation and divorce severely limits their ability to support their children at the precise time that children need the emotional support and reassurance of their parents (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003; Moloney & Smyth, 2004). While most couples will experience some level of conflict in the post-separation period there is also increasing acknowledgement at legislative, research and community levels of the need to prevent post-separation conflict becoming entrenched. Unfortunately it is entrenched conflict which most often results in decreased contact with one parent, which generally speaking is the father. This is particularly important as research indicates the value and importance of the equal involvement of both parents in a child's life and of both parents remaining involved in their child's life following separation (Moloney & Smyth, 2004; Parkinson, 2006; Smyth & Moloney, 2008).

The Family Law Amendment Act has aims which:

- target the building of stronger families and preventing separation, and then encouraging greater involvement of both parents post-separation
- help separated parents agree what is best for children
- improve access to services for families experiencing separation and divorce.

With regard to the third aim, the establishment of federally sponsored Family Relationship Centres (FRC) was significant as it recognised the importance of services being more responsive to the needs of both adults and children experiencing separation and divorce and the importance of offering a range of services which would cater for those differing needs. The recognition of the role of both parents in a child's life has placed greater emphasis on parents reaching mutually agreeable arrangements regarding care and contact for their children, preferably without recourse to the legal system. The FRC have a role in providing family dispute-resolution services and post-separation programs to assist parent to reach agreement.

A recent review of the Family Law Amendment Act (Kaspiew et al., 2009) found that since 2006 there has been an increase in the use of family relationship services and a decline in court filings, indicating that many parents are able to reach mutually acceptable arrangements for the care of their children post-separation. The review found that just over 60% of parents report being in friendly or cooperative relationships, with 71% of fathers and 73% of mothers reporting they had successfully managed to negotiate the care arrangements for their children (Kaspiew et al., 2009). However, the situation for families experiencing abuse or violence either pre- or post-separation continues to be of concern. The report found that satisfactorily dealing with inter-parental conflict remains a major concern at social, legal and personal levels. Further, family dispute resolution was regarded as not appropriate for all families, with one in five parents reporting safety concerns regarding ongoing contact with the child's other parent, with women twice as likely as men to report a fearful relationship. While the trend for shared care has been apparent since changes in legislation in 2006, the appropriateness of shared care arrangements in some families (particularly those experiencing violence and abuse) has also recently been questioned (Chisholm, 2009).

POST-SEPARATION CONFLICT

Inter-parental conflict can typically consist of three factors: legal conflicts, interpersonal conflict and attitudinal conflict (Goodman et al., 2004). Legal conflict occurs in the context of the court, including litigation and care disputes. Attitudinal conflict comes from a parent's personal view of the other parent and includes anger and hostility. Interpersonal (or inter-parental) conflict is the behaviour displayed between parents, including "putting the other parent down" to friends and family, arguing and physical violence. Goodman et al. found that only interpersonal conflict was significantly correlated with child adjustment problems and that negative effects were most likely to occur when the children were aware of (through seeing and/or hearing) the conflict occurring between their parents. This type of enduring or entrenched conflict may result from a number of factors including financial, social or personal issues and can be typified as the inability of the adults to compromise with each other, to communicate appropriately, or not using appropriate coping skills (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003).

While a normal range of emotions following separation will include disappointment, anger and grief, it is important for the future emotional health of both the parents and the children that these issues are dealt with in a timely manner and that new healthy, interpersonal relationships are established (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004). The post-separation psychological adjustment of the parents has been shown to contribute to the adjustment of the children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999), and successfully dealing with the often negative emotions associated with separation and divorce has been identified as one of the precursors to successful post-separation co-parenting (Burke, McIntosh, & Gridley, 2009). As parenting plans are now part of the legal requirements for separating couples, assisting parents to set aside their conflicts in the interests of their children has become the focus of many agencies in the social services sector in Australia.

IMPORTANCE OF CO-PARENTING

Enduring conflict between parents can impact on the effectiveness of co-parenting the children from the relationship, as well as influencing children's long-term emotional, social and behavioural outcomes (Burke et al., 2009; Goodman et al., 2004; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). Bacon and McKenzie (2004) reported that children experiencing inter-parental conflict are at risk of problem behaviours, lower levels of school accomplishment and poor psychological adjustment. They may also have trouble socially maintaining positive relationships with family members and peers. Additionally, higher rates of psychological disorders, addiction and criminal actions are seen in adults who were children of divorced or separated families.

While much research has highlighted the negative effects of divorce on children, it has been suggested that successful co-parenting can reduce the effects of divorce upon children and allow them to adjust to their new situation (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004; McIntosh, 2003; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). Indeed there is some evidence to suggest that providing a child with continued contact with both parents, without any parental confrontation, may result in similar psychological and social outcomes to a child who hasn't experienced a divorce (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004).

The presence and level of ongoing inter-parental conflict is a significant factor in determining continued contact of both parents with the children. Factors which impact on the continued involvement of both parents in a child's life following divorce include: parents beginning new relationships; one parent moving away; the child's feelings about contact with the parent; children suffering coercion to alienate the non-resident parent; violence; and drug and alcohol abuse (Brown, 2008; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). Learning effective co-parenting techniques is therefore imperative if parents are to facilitate children's positive adjustment (Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). While parenting responsibility is no longer automatically given to mothers it is still the case that fathers are more likely to be the non-resident parent, and it is fathers who consequently show significant decreases in levels of involvement post-separation (Brown, 2008). Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of the role fathers have in a child's development, Brown (2008) reported that a large percentage of fathers lose contact with their children after separation despite being given court-ordered time with their children. Continued conflict between parents and the inability to resolve deep feelings of loss and grief related to the relationship are contributory factors to father disengagement. Fathers also experience feelings of loss around the everyday contact with their children leaving fathers feeling "marginalised and stigmatised" (Brown 2008).

Divorce education programs can help parents understand the effects of their conflict upon their children, increase parent knowledge about how to be a co-parent, and encourage parents to communicate and problem solve between each other, all of which will reduce the exposure of children to parental conflict (K. M. Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rousis, & Hoza, 1998). It is believed that highly conflicted parents can still enter into a successful co-parenting relationship, somewhat like a business relationship (Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). Post-separation education programs are therefore being developed to help parents understand the impacts of their behaviour upon their children and to encourage more effective communication and decision-making in regard to their children.

POST-SEPARATION PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

While there has been an increased focus on post-separation parenting programs since the early 1990s the literature regarding the effectiveness of such programs in Australia is sparse (Burke et al., 2009; McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003; McIntosh & Long, 2006). The bulk of the literature regarding post-separation parenting programs comes from the United States where divorce programs have been part of legal proceedings in many states for some time. By 1994 around 541 counties in the United States were using some type of divorce education program and many courts enforced mandatory attendance at these programs. Post-separation parenting programs had been introduced by the court system as court-imposed decisions regarding parenting issues were not deemed to be achieving the best outcome for children or families. It appeared that many conflicted and separating parents were expecting the courts to make decisions for them, decisions which they were either unable or unwilling to make. Programs were introduced to assist parents understand the impact that conflict had on children and to encourage joint decision-making. Many of the education programs were developed by county court workers based on previous materials from known programs and local needs, combined with the knowledge and expertise of the workers (Blaisure &

Geasler, 1996). While there is anecdotal evidence to suggest there was some benefit to participants, there is a general lack of longitudinal, empirical data on the efficacy of the programs (Burke et al., 2009).

The efficacy of parenting programs in general is an issue, particularly in Australia where the lack of rigorous evaluation has led to the “ad hoc adoption of programs without a detailed understanding of the content, method of delivery or the expected outcomes” (Watson, White, Taplin, & Huntsman, 2005). Cautions have also been given regarding the capacity of post-separation programs to make substantive changes in children’s lives post-separation (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003) particularly given the broad range of difficulties and differences in the issues facing separating parents. In their review of general parenting programs Watson et al. (2005) identified the need to address characteristics and needs of specific groups of parents and while they did not include post-separation parenting as a category in their review the particular needs of this group certainly merit specific consideration. This has been recognised in part through the establishment of FRC and the increasing number of programs for post-separation parents. However, like the more general parenting programs, post-separation programs in Australia are also under-evaluated (Deacon-Wood & McIntosh, 2002). One study that did attempt to bring a more rigorous research framework to the evaluation of a post-separation program used an outcome program-evaluation design (Brown, 2008). The evaluation found that the vast majority of participants in the study felt that the program had benefitted themselves and their children and concluded that the program being evaluated (Parenting Orders Program) did produce positive change in the problematic contact that all participants were experiencing.

Inter-parental conflict is seen by researchers as the form of conflict most associated with child negative adjustment and to date it would appear that participating in some form of post-separation parental programs is generally beneficial to most parents. However, there are several factors discussed within the literature which impact on the effectiveness of post-separation education programs. These factors include: the design of the program; the content of the program; group factors and evaluation of the programs.

Design of the program

Post-separation education programs can range from brief informational sessions through to longer, more intensive therapeutic sessions which cater to parents in a state of deadlock². All styles of education programs appear to be better than no program at all and all designs seem to have positive effects on parents, although there are frequent references within the literature to limitations in the evaluation of many programs (Burke et al., 2009; McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003; McIntosh, Long, & Wells, 2009). One of the differences in effectiveness between programs is related to their program orientation, either information- or skill-based programs.

² A point noted in reviewing the literature for this report is that while many programs are described as “brief interventions” or “long interventions” there is rarely any quantification of the actual length of such programs. “Brief” has been used to describe a two-hour program and a one-day program, while “long” generally refers to several sessions over some weeks, but once again the number of weeks is not always specified

Information-based programs provide information to parents about the effects of separation upon children and knowledge on how to identify when a child is not coping. These programs are more likely to be one-off sessions in the form of a lecture or an address to a large group of parents (K. M. Kramer et al., 1998). The general education techniques tend to be passive and the facilitator generally “engages the group, elicits questions, relates the relevant information, and makes recommendations that have practical utility within a short timeframe” (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003).

Skill-based programs are structured to assist parents acquire and practice specific skills to enhance communication and cooperation, with the aim of reducing post-separation conflict. More specifically, techniques are taught to parents on how to handle money issues, the handover of children between parents, holiday scheduling, and the different standards that can be set by parents in two separate homes (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004). Skill-based programs are generally longer than information-based programs, running over several weeks. Skill-based sessions may also involve videos, homework, workbooks, active discussion and role-playing (K. M. Kramer et al., 1998; McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003). Information-based programs tend to adopt passive techniques, such as listening or reading information, while skill-based programs are generally more interactive, implementing role-play and active discussion (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003).

Findings regarding the effectiveness of skill- and information-based programs vary. Kramer et al. (1998) found from a comparison of information- and skill-based programs that both equally reduced a child’s exposure to parental conflict in the short-term, as well as being successful at improving the understanding of parents of their child’s needs. However neither had effects on the actual amount of inter-parental conflict experienced after the courses, even if this conflict was no longer occurring in front of the child. Kramer et al. also found that neither was able to improve child problem behaviours, which perhaps indicates the need for a clearly articulated rationale and set of outcomes for programs. Skill-based programs are believed to be the better option because the teaching methods employed address the visual (experiential) and kinaesthetic (feelings and emotions) experience and these are believed to be the most effective and influential ways of learning although they are more costly (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004).

While Kramer et al. (1998) found no change to levels of inter-parental conflict from skill-based programs (and there are problems within the literature in defining the nature of many programs) later research on skill-based programs is more positive concerning improvements in inter-parental conflict levels. Groups that run for more than six hours with skill-based, experiential components have been identified as being more effective in teaching skills to reduce inter-parental conflict such as improving communication techniques between parents, educating parents on reducing conflict, influencing behaviour in respects to their child’s wellbeing and increasing parental cooperation while decreasing conflict (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004). While there are many variations in methods of evaluation and contextual variables which must be considered, several more recent research groups and reviews (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004; Burke et al., 2009; Goodman et al., 2004) have also concluded that long-term, skill-based programs generally show encouraging evidence in improving the state of inter-parental conflict.

Content of the program

Within the literature on post-separation programs there is little discussion of the precise content of programs or their theoretical underpinnings. One article discusses differences between reflective and behaviourist orientation for programs and concludes that a behaviourist orientation with its emphasis on skill development is more likely to achieve change in the behaviour of separated parents (Brown, 2008). Interestingly though, in a recent review (Burke et al., 2009) the authors comment that some programs may not be teaching some parents new material and it is in fact the opportunity to reflect on their actions that promotes change. This highlights the highly individual nature of the types of problems parents experience post-separation combined with the nature of the conflict in which they are involved (entrenched or short-term), the stage at which they attend a post-separation program and indeed if one or both parents attend.

The rationale that underlines divorce education programs is the belief that “knowledge is power” (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003) and by providing adequate information to parents post-separation education programs have the potential to assist parents decrease conflict and increase cooperation. Just as the length and design of programs vary so too does the content, and while programs have proliferated this review could find few studies of effective program content. While somewhat dated, (Braver, Salem, Pearson, & DeLuse, 1996) is one of the few studies to systematically review the content of post-separation programs, although it should be noted the effectiveness of the content in meeting program aims was not evaluated.

In the study, the content of 102 parent education programs for separating and divorcing parents was analysed. Braver et al. (1996) found that the most intensive coverage in programs was given to children’s needs and the impact of parents’ behaviour on children (e.g. the benefits of parental cooperation rather than conflict, typical reactions of children, the impact of “brainwashing” the child or “badmouthing” the other parent and the different reactions and needs of children at different ages). Moderate coverage was given to conflict management and parenting skills. The length of the programs reviewed by Braver et al. varied and they comment that it is likely that while information was provided regarding conflict management and parenting techniques it is unlikely that parents had adequate time to develop the associated skills. Content given the least coverage included domestic violence, legal issues and financial issues (Braver et al. 1996). However, they suggest it is possible that even exposure to information about conflict management in a short program may sensitise parents to the issue and encourage them to seek further assistance. Similar conclusions have been reached by Kramer and Washo (1993) and DeLuse, Braver et al (1995).

The teaching methods used in the programs reviewed by Braver, et al (1996) varied considerably. The shorter, less intensive programs focused on the negative effects of conflict on children and information was presented verbally or in written form. Programs that covered material slightly more intensively tried to motivate parents to decrease conflict by showing them videos in addition to verbal information regarding how children are affected by conflict and showing examples of how children become involved in conflict, such as carrying messages between parents. The most intensive programs use the above techniques but also looked at teaching problem-solving skills and methods of resolving conflict. The programs utilised videos, encouraged more considerate behaviours (such

as not bad-mouthing the other parent), promoting “I” statements and using role-play (Goodman et al., 2004). It is unfortunate that few of the 102 studies in the sample were evidenced-based. However, a recent literature review (Burke et al., 2009) lists several evidenced-based programs, most of which are skill-based, that provide information in an interactive manner and encourage the development of skills to address conflict management and parental behaviour. Given that longer, skill-based programs appear more likely to bring about changes in parental behaviour it would seem reasonable to conclude that longer-term programs that use a variety of teaching techniques combined with well-presented factual material are more effective than one-off information-based sessions.

Group factors and evaluation of the program

In Australia, being mandated by the Family Court to attend a post-separation education program is a relatively recent change in divorce proceedings and, as has been mentioned elsewhere in this review, the evaluation and research into programs and the impact on parents who attend either voluntarily or not lacks both rigour and depth (Deacon-Wood & McIntosh, 2002). There is however an underlying assumption that group-work programs are an effective and viable way of educating parents in the post-separation period and there are a number of programs which have been designed to meet the needs of families experiencing separation and divorce. It is however extremely difficult to compare groups or their effectiveness due to factors related to the conduct (design, length) and location (in which country, community setting, legal setting) of groups, the profiles of those who attend (mandated, voluntary) and the interactions between the factors. For instance, legal requirements and terminology varies by country and frequently by county or state. Thus “mandated to attend” may have quite different implications regarding domestic violence issues, parenting responsibility and contact issues; even the language related to mothers and fathers either residing with or visiting their children varies.

While running longer programs of five to six weeks may be more cost-intensive than brief, one-off workshops or seminars it has been found that presenting information to a group is more cost effective than the one-on-one therapeutic approach (Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). Shifflett and Cummings identified that six to 12 participants in a group facilitates and creates a “safe space” for participants while maintaining a degree of intimacy between facilitator and participants. They also found that breaking participants up into groups of custodial parents and non-custodial parents was effective as this is an issue of importance and great concern to parents.

Cunningham et al. (1995) found that holding group parent programs in community bases can be more than six times as cost effective as traditional methods. They also found that having these programs in a community facility, such as a school hall or community centre, increased the likelihood that families from differing cultural backgrounds would attend the groups.

CONCLUSIONS

In 2003 over 1,200 divorce education programs were being utilised by the United States courts and communities to help parents work through the separation transition. Shifflet and Cummings (1999) commented that while divorce-related education interventions are widely developed, very rarely were they evaluated for effectiveness, and they stressed the need for research-based programs that have an empirically guided design. While there has been a growing market in the past decade for post-separation education programs in both the US and Australia, and there exists a large public belief of their effectiveness (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003), in the intervening years since Shifflet and Cummings' paper very few programs have been evaluated beyond the point of parent satisfaction (Goodman et al., 2004; McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003).

However, encouraging data have been put forth by McIntosh and Deacon-Wood (2003) who list the differences between those parents who attended a divorce education program and those who did not. They found that parents who attended a program:

- showed better understanding of the effects of divorce on their children
- could recognise the signs of distress within their children
- were more likely to give adequate support to their children
- were more confident in their decision making over a six-month period
- increased the amount of regular contact that parent had with their child (McIntosh & Deacon-Wood, 2003).

There is also the potential for positive indirect and even cumulative improvements in children's lives to flow from post-separation programs, but the nature of such positive effects remain under-researched.

It is possible to conclude that well-structured programs with clear outcomes, which are conducted over several weeks and focus on a combination of information and interactive skill-development, can assist parents in coming to terms with their situation and learning to place the needs of their children first. However, group post-separation programs are not suitable for everyone (particularly those who have experienced abuse and violence) and the complexities of post-separation lives mean that generic, skill-based programs may not be what some parents need. Indeed, Burke et al. (2009) concluded that a range of programs is likely to be needed. Johnston, Kline and Tschann (1989) found that some parents experiencing entrenched conflict did not need more information but rather intensive, therapeutic levels of intervention which enable the taking of responsibility and the resolution of individual conflicts, with the assistance of peers and the support of group facilitators. Clearly there is a need for further research into the effectiveness of post-separation parenting programs which also investigates the nuanced interaction of individual circumstances and programming content and style.

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation used a mixed-method approach and was undertaken in four steps: a literature review; a review of existing evaluation data collected by the agencies; qualitative data collection from program facilitators; and qualitative and quantitative data collection from program participants.³ All evaluation work was undertaken with the permission of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Newcastle. The methodology also incorporated the Results-Based Accountability framework of (Friedman, 2006). The framework looks at both the quantity and quality of effort and effect pertaining to specific programs. To this end, key questions were embedded in the staff focus-group questions, participant surveys and interview. These were:

1. How much did we do?
2. How well did we do it?
3. How much change did we produce?
4. What quality of change did we produce?

PARTICIPANTS

Participants for the evaluation were drawn from two groups.

1. Staff from the four agencies connected with the KKIM program. Staff who participated in the focus groups included: the developers and writers of the program; members of the interagency steering committee; those who were facilitators of the program; and staff who had input in the development and/or implementation of the program.
2. Parents who have taken part in the KKIM program across three of the agencies.⁴

PROCEDURE

The evaluation team obtained documentation related to the number of groups and number of participants from the three agencies, facilitator reflections on the conduct of the program, and participant evaluations. This information was used to inform the development of questions for the staff focus groups and the parent survey. A group interview was held with the steering committee in order to obtain an overview of the background to KKIM as well as an understanding of the purpose, structure and content of the program.

Two focus groups of Catholic Care and Centacare staff were conducted by two of the evaluation team.

³ As noted by Brown (2008) the inclusion of children's voices in evaluations of post-separation programs can greatly enhance the researchers' understanding of the impact of the program. The authors of this report are aware of the contribution that children's voices could make to progressing the research in this area; however, this was not possible due to budgetary and timeframe constraints.

⁴ These were the Sydney, Parramatta and Wollongong agencies. At the time of writing Broken Bay had not conducted any KKIM groups.

Attendees included writers and facilitators of the KKIM program as well as managerial staff with responsibilities for the implementation of KKIM. Both focus groups were audio recorded. Questions asked during the group (Appendix 1) drew on Friedman's (2006) Results-Based Accountability framework and therefore canvassed:

1. the level of involvement and role of focus group members in KKIM (How much did we do?)
2. perceptions regarding the content of the KKIM, the process of conducting KKIM, their own performances as facilitators (How well did we do it?)
3. their observations and knowledge of the impact of the KKIM program on participants (How much change did we produce? What quality of change did we produce?)⁵

Suggestions for improvement in course content and process were also canvassed.

A parent survey (Appendix 2) was developed in order to gather qualitative and quantitative data concerning the participants' experiences of the KKIM program and their perceptions of the impact of KKIM on themselves and their children. The structure of the survey was informed by the literature review, the information obtained through the focus groups and previous evaluations obtained by Catholic Care during KKIM sessions. A draft of the survey was circulated to participants in the staff focus groups and some adjustments were made before the surveys were sent to parents.

The survey gathered quantitative and qualitative data related to changes in participants':

- knowledge regarding the impact of parental behaviour on children's wellbeing
- attitudes towards their own behaviour and that of the other parent
- knowledge of skills and strategies for managing their own and the other parent's behaviours related to co-parenting
- behaviours related to co-parenting and other associated areas.

In accordance with the approved ethics procedures, the recruitment of parents who had participated in the KKIM program utilised a double-blind procedure. Surveys were sent to participants in KKIM through the Catholic Care agencies, along with a letter explaining the purpose of the surveys, and inviting participants to complete an interview with a researcher. Completed surveys were returned to the evaluation team either anonymously or, if parents were willing to participate in an interview, they had the option to supply their contact details. A four-week timeline was allowed for consideration of the invitation and completion of the surveys. To maximise recruitment a follow-up letter and another set of materials was sent out. Initially the follow-up letter was to be sent after six weeks but, as Christmas and summer holidays occurred during the evaluation, the follow-up letter was sent eight weeks after the initial letter.

Parents who volunteered to be interviewed were contacted by telephone to confirm their participation and a mutually agreeable time decided upon. Interviews were conducted over the telephone, were recorded and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The interviews were semi-structured and intended to draw out participants' perceptions regarding: the conduct and content of KIMM; the impact of KIMM on their own lives; and the impact of KIMM on their relationships with their children and the other parent (Appendix 3).

⁵ The methodological difficulties inherent in this type of data gathering are acknowledged. It is noted that focus group participants were reporting their own observations of programs they had conducted and therefore open to bias.

RESULTS

This section will report on the results of the staff focus groups, parent surveys and parent interviews conducted as part of the evaluation of KKIM. Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel software and qualitative data were analysed using Nvivo 8 software. Survey answers and interviews were broken into broad themes based around participant responses regarding behaviour, knowledge and attitudes, as well as useful content and improvements.

BACKGROUND DATA

Table 1 indicates the location and numbers for KKIM courses conducted from the pilot program in May 2008 until December 2009.

TABLE 1: NUMBERS OF MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS IN KKIM.

OFFICE	NUMBER OF GROUPS	NUMBER OF MEN	NUMBER OF WOMEN	TOTAL
Wollongong	4	11	21	33
Campbelltown	3	9	15	24
Nowra	2	5	2	7
Blacktown	4	12	10	22
City	1	6	4	10
Enmore	3	11	4	15
Fairfield	4	8	9	17
Totals	21	62	65	127

FACILITATOR FOCUS GROUPS

The strength and effectiveness of KKIM

Focus groups with facilitators were conducted in a central location for participants from the four agencies involved in the program. There were seven participants in Focus Group 1 and 13 participants in Focus Group 2.

The strengths of KKIM and reasons for the program's effectiveness were brainstormed as part of the focus group process and recorded on a whiteboard. There was consistency between the two groups in their thoughts about the strengths of KKIM and the reasons for its effectiveness. A summary of the brainstorming sessions with Focus Groups 1 and 2 are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF THE STRENGTHS OF KKIM

STRENGTHS OF KKIM	
Up-to-the minute content and research	Respectful and non-judgemental
Utilises different modalities to get the message across	Challenging
Very honest and confronting	Strong imagery to reinforce understanding of concepts
Meets the needs of high-conflict parents	The supportiveness of the group
Group process helps to normalise feelings	Use of visual cues
The self-regulation of the group	Acknowledging the "tough stuff"
Use of videos	Evidence-based
Communication model	Different modalities for learning
Hearing from peers within the group	Combination of education and counselling
Mixed gender gives different perspective	Child focus and impact on the child
Practical nature of the content	Building connections and relationships in Week 1 and builds to challenging parents
Networking and building support	Acknowledges the tough stuff e.g. grief
Use of humour	Evidence-based
Focus on children	Able to challenge parents
Dealing with grief	Use of metaphor
Hearing different perspectives	Using a research base
Strong theoretical basis	Good length of sessions allows people to settle in
Use of visual cues	Utilises a variety of learning styles

Three major themes emerged from the data regarding the effectiveness of KKIM. These were related to: the content of the program itself; the structure of the program (i.e. group work); and the skill of the facilitators presenting the program or processes.

CONTENT

As can be seen from Table 2 (above) participants felt that the strong theoretical and research orientation of the material forming the content of KKIM was an important aspect of the program's effectiveness.

It's really great sound knowledge and good theoretical touch and I think it's a secure base to work from. All the theories are in place.

I think that its evidenced-based, it's up to the minute and it uses different modalities.

The research was able to be combined with practical suggestions in a way which was accessible for the wide range of parents who attend KKIM. For instance, there was general agreement that the use of visuals (e.g. the butterfly motif used throughout program materials) were excellent ways of conveying information, as well as reinforcing the need for attitudinal changes.

I think the research underpins the imagery – it gives it weight, but I think it's the imagery that has ... is the most powerful.

The butterfly is of loss and grief and so they've got their own butterfly and then their children have got their own butterfly as well and they quite often talk about that. So yeah – I think it's the images.

I like the visual parts – there's a, just gives a visual picture, a bridge and that gives a really strong message.

A lot of parents talked about the realisation – the WMDs [see "The design and implementation of KKIM", later] was really quite powerful and the realisation that their own behaviour wasn't helpful and realising what there were and identifying that.

Facilitators noted the importance of the learning associated with the communication model and in particular the concept of filters. Both the content and the delivery mode were identified as being important to the learning experience.

The communication model – I like the communication model – the filters help them to identify what baggage or hindrance they bring into that relationship and the way they communicate.

The communication style. Just being aware of how they're communicating – that they can change that. That's something to have power over, that they can change – that they can use straight away. And that's something you can also get feedback on as well. And again – the way that's presented – that role-play – just so much more powerful when it's presented here before you, than just being told about it.

STRUCTURE

The structure of KKIM was also discussed by the groups. There was discussion regarding the number of sessions, with some staff feeling that the material could be covered in fewer sessions whilst others saw value in longer sessions and more weeks. The differences in opinion generally were related to how individual facilitators managed the content of each session and ultimately it was agreed that the number of sessions was appropriate, in light of the realities of people being time poor and dealing with people who are experiencing a level of chaos and turmoil in their lives.

I thought having a look at the session, either having it slightly longer or to have a bit more of a break, or to have maybe even an extra session at the end, because sometimes there's a lot of content you need to take home and take in, so maybe reviewing that and then the homework as well.

I don't know that I'd want to see it run longer, particularly if you're doing the night time where its already well into the night.

I think if we cut it shorter, I don't think we'd fit everything in, and if it was longer we'd lose people.

The thing about the parent dilemmas is that it's to allow you, if you do finish early you can actually put in a couple of parenting dilemmas instead, but we've never, I don't think we've ever finished early except for possibly on Week 5, with a 15-minute break.

A general opinion from both focus groups was that the group-work structure of the KKIM program was a definite strength. The group dynamics formed as part of the process of conducting the program provided a safe place for parents, many of whom might not previously have talked about some of the issues raised. In addition to being safe, the group presents a neutral space away from the influences of family and friends for reflection on their relationships.

So it's an opportunity for them to experience a real safe place, when they can begin to absorb some of what's going on. It's very powerful.

And I think the other thing that is the strength is that it's done really respectfully and I think people feel, I don't think people feel judged. I think people feel really supported and feel it's quite a safe environment to share.

I mean, coming from conflict and their families, obviously their families will support them and say that the other person is wrong and yes, you do have that, yes, you have the battle and you have to do that, but then they come to a program like this and say, "Well, no, not really".

Importantly, while the facilitators were supportive of participants, the program also presented some challenging ideas and concepts that required parents to:

... face up to the impact of their behaviours and their responsibilities.

The combination of skilled facilitation and sharing experiences with others in similar situations were important factors in fostering more self-responsibility.

And I was standing up at the time making a point and she brought it up and we were in this really small room and she would go, "No, no, no, he just won't see it. It's his fault. It's all about him." And I go, "Well, if you don't put anything in place to give him times or anything like that, then how can he actually do it?" So I just sat down and I wouldn't let it go, I decided we were going to sort this out and the whole room was absolutely quiet and I just sat there and it was a very therapeutic moment, 'cause I wheeled my chair up to sit in front of her and it was it was just the two of us having this conversation and she started to get teary and then she went, "Actually it's my WMD" and I was – and the whole group went, "Yep, it is". And the whole group was so lovely with her and so supportive when she was really challenged by what she was doing.

Because we connect with them at that level to build a relationship with them, we can then challenge them. So, no challenging really happens in Week 1. And I think that's where we demonstrate respect.

And I think the other thing with the group is also the situation where a group member will say something that you want to say and they say it, it's actually when somebody hears it from a peer, rather than a professional.

I was going to say that the power of the group is that people will tend to listen more because they are in the same situation as you, more than you sitting back as a counsellor and, yes, just kind of a woman's preaching – and there's nothing more powerful while these people are doing it with me.

Facilitators noted there were differences in how participants initially presented in the group (wary, hostile, keen to learn) and while some participants were almost antagonistic at the beginning (particularly if they were court-ordered) there were often noticeable changes in body language, attitude and group participation over the five weeks. Facilitators also spoke of how frequently there was initial reluctance to engage in the program but that in the majority of cases there was a turnaround by the second or third week.

And by the third week, right through to the fifth week he – you could see he'd made significant change, he was actually sitting forward and paying attention, he was actually helping people in the group if they struggled with particular concepts, he'd talk about it from his point of view, without trying to make them take his point of view, which I thought was quite significant for this particular gentleman.

These changes were attributed by the facilitators to the "power of the group" – hearing different perspectives on separation and divorce from both genders, the self-regulating nature of the group and hearing practical ideas from other parents.

[They might come into group one week and say] ... "Well, last week I was having an argument with the other parent and I remember exactly when I was starting to get all agitated and ready to get into it, but I tried to think what [the group facilitator] would

say about this.” That’s when we know that they’re thinking about it, or using what we’ve been talking about during the group.

The facilitators were generally positive about the mixed gender of the group participants. Mixed-gender groups provided an opportunity to hear the respective views of each gender in a neutral setting.

I found too the fact that they’re mixed – well, they’re not always mixed groups, but often they’re mixed groups – and that brings a dimension that’s very helpful for them to hear the other side of – like for the women to hear the men come forth with things that they just haven’t heard in that way and vice versa.

And just in another course we’ve just run, we had a woman come in and she started to have a ... in tears immediately and she went, “I’m sorry. I’m just crying, ‘cause there’s men in the room and I’m so glad to see men here wanting to work on this as well”.

Yeah, and I think the other thing about having men and women in the group is that the men are the link (I think you said it earlier), they get the different perspectives from each other and so they can listen to what each others’ points of view are and can extrapolate that – what’s going on for them in their lives.

FACILITATION

While the content and structure of the program contributed to the impact of KKIM the importance of the skills of the facilitators in managing the group process was implicit in discussions of the facilitation experience. Listening skills, knowledge and skill in working with the stages of group development, the capacity to balance content and process in order to manage the educational and the therapeutic elements of the program, and the capacity to manage the group dynamics are important aspects of the facilitation role.

So, really, having really good real effective listening skills too, when you get a moment from a person and allowing them to sit in that moment. That’s been a very crucial part of the group, rather than missing those moments.

So, I think what we do in Week 1 is we really work on building the relationship. By talking about the loss and grief, we’re talking about the really tough stuff and connecting with them about that and going, “Yep, this is really, really tough”. And for you and for your kids and for everybody involved, you never dreamt when you walked down the aisle this is where you’re going to be.

Because we connect with them at that level to build a relationship with them, we can then challenge them. So, no challenging really happens in Week 1. And I think that’s where we demonstrate respect.

I think that’s also another one of the strengths is that acknowledgement of grief and loss and anger and change and it allows people to then – it’s been acknowledged – now I

can let that sit and now look at my responsibility or changing the balance in my attitude. I think that's a really important part of it too. But they've not just walked in and then been invited to change the way you're doing things. There is that process of acknowledgement first.

Especially the vulnerability, when they might be sitting with something of some of the content and we could see that they were moving – something was happening, for them emotionally and we stop the process in the group and allow them to sit on that.

I found with the next section was that, both times we had to give – in the first one we had somebody and in the second we had somebody that almost spoils the group that you have to really be onto because they're in their own rational space and they may not be ready for that group. You have to really work on that person. Not to take over from the group. And the group will come and complain to you about it.

The value of co-facilitation in attending to both content and process was also noted, particularly in relation to balancing both the educational and the therapeutic elements of the group.

And sometimes I know that [xxx] would change her posture and I might be saying something and she's picked [up on something] someone's done something or some body language indicates some kind of movement and I was – my centre of position kind of stopped (like a bus in the middle of the desert) and just kind of hear this silence and [xxx] might say, "Something's happening for him there". So the group process would move from content to process. And just allow the person – and later on we gave them that space to know what is it that's going on for you there.

Is it a class, is it a group, where's the line? And it has to work in a way that there's not an obvious tension between those two.

But I think doing it with two enables you to be able to have the process conversations, which is maybe why you're finishing early, because if you've got one person, then I think it's probably hard to do the presenting and be able to monitor what's happening in the room process-wise and to have the therapeutic conversations.

The benefits of mixed-gender facilitation were discussed. It would appear that whilst in the early stages of the group mixed gender may be beneficial this is not an issue once relationships of trust and confidence are established.

But yeah, I don't know how much a difference with two females or two males. I think it's good maybe in the beginning, people come and open up who need formal counselling, but later on I think the more they get to know you the more confident they feel.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PARTICIPANTS

The impacts of the KKIM group-work program from the facilitators' perspective include attitudinal shifts arising from understanding the child's perspectives, learning to separate parent conflict from parent-child relationships, developing a capacity for self-reflection and empathy, and being empowered by taking responsibility for their own behaviour. A summary of the focus groups' ideas relating to impressions about the impact of KKIM is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT OF KKIM.

SUMMARY OF IMPACT OF KKIM FROM FOCUS GROUPS 1 & 2	
Shift in parents' thinking	Learning to focus on child's needs – not the parent's needs
Recognition of the role of a parent	Realisation of the effect of conflict
Being able to self-reflect	Developing a capacity of change
Unlocking defensiveness	Realisation of the other parent's relationship with the child
Containing emotions	Decreased conflict
Empathise with the child	Realisation that they can't change the other parent's behaviour
Moving from passive to active engagement with child	Moments of great insight (Ah hah)
Language is more respectful	Taking responsibility for own behaviour
Greater self-awareness/self-critique	Less blaming and less arguments
Taking greater ownership and responsibility for the situation	Changes in thinking about the other parent
Parents felt empowered	Realisation that they can't change the other parent's behaviour
Changes in thinking about the other parent	Realisation that they can't change the other parent's behaviour
Less blaming and less arguments	Moments of great insight (Ah hah)
	Taking responsibility for own behaviour

The facilitators felt that the primary purpose of the program – promoting the importance of consideration of children's positions within divorce and separation – was strongly evidenced by participants even during the course of the program.

... understanding that [the conflict] is going to happen in front of their children. I think that keeping kids in mind, even the name itself, really focusing on that ... its not what happens, it's actually how you manage the conflict ... that is important.

And their ability to then, as a result of that, empathise with where their child is at. Their ability to sit with – what is this conflict like for my child? Not just, "What does this conflict look like for me?" but "What does this conflict look like for my child?"

The explicit child focus could be challenging for parents, particularly when they were required to put their children's wellbeing ahead of their own often-destructive needs for retribution. Recognition that their child does have another parent and that it is to the benefit of the children to have that parent involved in their lives was an important shift noted by the facilitators. This shift in turn highlighted the need for the parent to take responsibility for his or her behaviour and to make some changes regarding interactions with the other parent.

I was thinking that they go from a more – you know, the groups that we've run, some of these parents have a very passive kind of approach that there's not much we can do: "She's the one that's taking me to court, there's not anything we can do, that's my bit".

And during that course of the group, they actually changed a little bit and they become a little bit more active and they become more understanding of their situation, understanding there's things they can do – not to engage in conflict, not to – in hopeless kinds of things

It was a shift in thinking – yes, there are certain things that perhaps I can't change and my battle with my partner is actually my battle. But I need to recognise that that person is the father or mother of that child.

We had – in one of the groups we had this mum and she said she makes them pick the kids up from down the street, she won't let him park outside the house and pick the kids up, so the kids have to walk down the street. And for a while, she couldn't see that there was anything wrong with that at all. And he, I knew that he had done the group and so it was – pushing up, putting up what's not right for your kids. Not even letting their dad park outside the house. He's staying in the car. And it was like this moment where she went, "Oh my God! I'm making my children do something that's actually not ok, because of how I feel."

The group processes embedded in KKIM foster a capacity for self-reflection and for empathy. The facilitators noticed these capacities are often new experiences for some participants.

Some of the participants didn't have the ability to reflect on who they are as a person ... And so, part of the group process was for them to be able to begin to develop the ability to reflect.

... but to watch them move, they move from being defensive to reflection, to being quite open. So there was a real kind of therapeutic process happening unlocking some of that defensiveness, which was very good. And their ability to then, as a result of that, to empathise with where their child is at.

The only thing I can say, that got up there, is that they become much more self-aware – it's a real eye-opener and even self-critical with what they're doing, which is a really big shift.

So I think that process of self-awareness happens even from the assessment intake.

Participants learning to view conflict through different lenses could have significant personal and emotional impacts on the participants. Facilitators spoke of examples of participants having moments of intense personal realisation and of making significant change in behaviour:

The biggest impact one particular guy I had was, I think it was during the week of conflict communication, and he sat there and it was like a veil being pulled from his eyes. And he said something along the lines, "If I had, I think if I had done this, or, if I had done this differently, I wouldn't be sitting here now". And he took this – it was like this incredible ownership. I mean, some of his issues were taking too much ownership anyway, but in this particular case it was, he'd come to a realisation that if he had done things differently, he wouldn't be sitting with us now.

We had one of the other parents, the father attended the group and, the other parent rang up at the conclusion of the group, about a week or two after it, saying "I can't believe the change in him. He's changed. He's a different person. He's walking differently. He's just completely changed." And that was such a massive shift, because in the beginning when he first came here and he was just describing the situation, there was massive conflict, they weren't talking, she was the nastiest piece of work on earth and the turnaround was incredible in what he'd done.

The matter of children's voices was raised in that a benchmark for KKIM would be improvements in children's wellbeing and safety – yet apart from parental reports there was no way of gauging the impact on children.

Areas to address within KKIM

The focus groups were also asked about issues related to the conduct of KKIM and for any suggestions regarding reworking of the KKIM program. Table 4 contains a compilation of comments from both focus groups. It should be remembered that these are suggestions generally from individuals, although in many instances there was agreement from the rest of the group regarding the need for changes. Across the two groups there appeared to be general agreement that the program's content was of good quality, the number of sessions were appropriate and the program flowed well from one week to another. Participants were engaged by the topics and the content, although some, understandably, found some of the content and concepts confronting. The more difficult aspects of the content and some concepts were handled differently by different facilitators. Other variations included not all groups being facilitated by two people and some facilitators "sticking to the script" while others were more innovative in their approach.

TABLE 4: SUMMARY OF FACILITATORS' COMMENTS REGARDING THE KKIM MANUAL.

1	Session 2 was seen as particularly long with complex explanations by most facilitators.
2	Need to include a précis of what is covered in each session to be explained to participants at the beginning of each session and also as an indicator of what to expect next week - some facilitators were already doing this.
3	A reworked manual could also use icons/graphics to indicate the different types of activities within each session, e.g. explanation/group discussion/individual reflection.
4	Several facilitators felt that some of the explanations of concepts and ideas were overly long and too complex. "Differentiation" seemed to be a particular concept that was handled differently by different facilitators.
5	The "fridge door" had varying levels of use in different groups. Some questioned its usefulness.
6	The concept of "forgiveness" some felt needed more explicit discussion.
7	There was general concern about the level of language in some explanations – the dilemma remains how to raise important issues with relevant and meaningful language and to be inclusive of all levels of education and literacy among the participants.
8	Similar comments were made about the power point slides; many were regarded as too wordy and too intense.
9	The "circle of security" was mentioned as a concept that was understood at different levels by facilitators and hence was explained in different ways.
10	Some questioned the level of compliance around "homework" and the need for its inclusion in the sessions.
11	Several facilitators mentioned the need to perhaps have more visuals to reinforce important points.

An area for further exploration identified by the facilitators was how KKIM links with other parenting, personal development and conflict-resolution programs and interventions. Suggestions included making sure information on other services is explored in the final two weeks of the program, and possibilities for follow-up sessions be considered.

Be good if once they finished the group and they basically wanted, could be referred to a one-on-one point of counselling or more to sort of bed down – because, I mean, you've got five weeks and if you're going to apply to someone, but if they think when the group is finished – is that people can feel– say feel isolated almost again.

So perhaps at Session 4 you start to flag that and say, "Next session that's going to be our last session, but we'd like to be able to hear from you what you think you need to move on and continue the benefits you perceive to being in this program." ... And so you've given a bit of warning, so hopefully when you come to the last session, maybe even just, you've sown the seed and have got some idea of what they might need and can talk about. You wouldn't spring.

One concept of follow up is ... more, like an advance kit, where they get the similar type of information but more.

PARENTAL RESPONSES

Surveys were distributed through agency offices. As shown in Table 5, Wollongong diocese sent out 44 surveys, Sydney 50 surveys and Parramatta 15 surveys. Twenty-one were returned completed and seven were returned *Address Unknown*. This represents a return rate of 19.27%.

TABLE 5: DETAILS OF SURVEYS RETURNED BY DIOCESE

LOCATION	NUMBER OF SURVEYS DISTRIBUTED	RETURNED IN FIRST ROUND	RETURNED IN FIRST ROUND	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
Wollongong diocese	44	6		1
Parramatta diocese	15	2	2	6
Sydney diocese	50	4	2	4
No location stated		5		
Total	109	17	4	11

Fourteen parents agreed to be interviewed and 11 interviews were conducted (three parents were not able to be contacted). Nineteen of the respondents had completed the course and two had not attended the last session of the program.

TABLE 6: DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESPONDENTS

Gender	Males = 8	Females = 13	
Aboriginal	1		
Other cultural background	Yes = 10	No = 11	
How long separated*	Less than 12 months = 5	12–36 months = 8	More than three years = 7
Mandated	Yes = 7	No = 14	
When attended	0–6 months ago = 14	6–12 months ago = 6	12–18 months ago = 1

* no response from one parent

Further demographic details are shown in Table 6. Thirty-eight percent of respondents were male and 62% were female. One respondent identified as Aboriginal. While 48% of the respondents identified with another cultural background only four of those respondents identified their background. On average respondents had been separated for 2½ years, although there was a wide range from six months to nearly 10 years. Most respondents had attended KKIM in the previous six months.

The number of children for all participants was between one and three, with ages of the children varying from two years to 13 years. The majority of respondents had children under nine years of age.

Impact of KKIM on parents' lives

Table 7 shows the responses to Section 2 of the survey. Parents were asked to respond on a 4-point Likert scale (4 = "Strongly Agree"; 1 = "Strongly Disagree") to statements based on the aims of KKIM. Results are shown as percentages of the number of responses.

TABLE 7: PARTICIPANT RESPONSES AS PERCENTAGES.

	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Average
I have a better understanding of how conflict impacts on my children. (Q2.1)	71	29	0	0	3.7
I am focusing more on my children's needs. (Q2.3)	62	33	5	0	3.6
I have a better understanding of how grief and loss I impacts on my children. (Q2.2)	43	57	0	0	3.4
I have a better understanding of my own behaviour related to dealing with conflict. (Q2.4)	48	43	10	0	3.4
I am not as defensive with the other parent. (Q2.6)	45	40	15	0	3.3
I have better understanding of my own behaviour related to dealing with grief and loss. (Q2.5)	30	60	10	0	3.2
I am better at coping with my own grief and loss. (Q2.8)	15	80	5	0	3.1
I feel I have more confidence in co-parenting my children. (Q2.13)	26	58	11	5	3.1
My children have noticed a positive change in me since I attended KKIM. (Q2.14)	26	63	5	5	3.1
I am better at communicating with the other parent. (Q2.9)	25	55	10	10	3.0
I am better at dealing with conflict with the other parent. (Q2.7)	25	50	20	5	3.0
I am less stressed when dealing with the other parent. (Q2.10)	29	41	18	12	2.9
I have a better understanding of the importance of the other parent. (Q2.12)	16	58	16	11	2.8
The other parent and I are now making better joint decisions. (Q2.11)	19	19	31	31	2.3

Parents were very positive about their improved understanding of how negative adult behaviours associated with divorce and separation impacted on children, and the majority of responses were "Strongly agree" or "Agree". In Table 9 (below) items are presented in decreasing order of agreement as shown by average responses. The more positive responses were generally for items concerning the parent's attitudes and internal attributes. These included: focusing on children's needs more; a better understanding of the impact of conflict on children; and a better understanding of their own responses to conflict.

While 85% either strongly agreed or agreed that as a result of KKIM they were less defensive with the other parent, parents did not agree as strongly that their attitudes towards the other parent had changed.

The surveys asked for qualitative as well as the quantitative responses, asking parents what they were doing differently in terms of parenting their child, working with the other parent, and how the children had benefitted from the parent's attendance at KKIM. Similar questions were asked of the interviewees. Responses on the surveys and from interviewees were consistent in terms of parents learning about: keeping the needs of children in mind; learning to manage their own emotions better; valuing the contribution of the other parent to the child's life; and benefitting from parenting strategies and skill development. Data collected from parents also endorsed the perceptions of the facilitators regarding the impact of KKIM on participants. Qualitative data from the surveys and interviews are presented below in the major themes that emerged from the analysis.

1. The major learning for parents was the realisation of the emotional and social impact that separation and divorce could have on children and the importance of placing greater emphasis on meeting the needs of the children.

Focusing on the time, needs and experiences of my child. Not responding or being antagonised by the other parent. Being more confident in my ability as a parent. Acknowledging and accepting limitations to current situation. (Female, survey response)

Explaining more clearly about separation and cares, empathising more with his feelings, being more positive to him about his [role as a] dad. (Female, survey response)

I no longer feel the need to fix everything. I now realise that sometimes what is required is just to listen empathetically. (Male, survey response)

Listening to the children, empathising with them when they miss their dad (Female, interview response).

2. Learning to manage their own emotions. Parents demonstrated changed behaviours in trying to ensure that they did not argue with the other parent in front of the children. Interview data indicate that parents had learnt to be less defensive and not be drawn into conflict as readily.

I am able to control my attitude toward their mum in the presence of the children. (Male, survey response)

I'm better able to let things slide ... this is not about point scoring. (Male, survey response)

Not letting her get on my nerves as much, learning frequently she tries to push my buttons and control my life, and say yeah, rather than get into a heated debate (Male, interview response)

Was already doing most of suggested skills, but I guess I am clearer as to what is my stuff and what is his stuff. Detaching more from the emotional side also. (Female, survey response)

3. Valuing the contribution of the other parent.

I am very open to listening to my daughter in her conversation. She is 10 and a half, I love her so much. I can't change my relationship with her father but we are so close and I know I have even more understanding. (Female, interview response)

Not feeling the need to correct him and tell him so much what to do, trying harder to speak about any "controversial" issue away from son (Female, survey response)

4. Parenting strategies and skill development. Parents spoke of spending "quality" time with children and creating opportunities to do things together.

I have implemented the skills I had and complemented them with the new/refreshing information obtained. (Female, survey response)

More calmer, my daughter and I frequently sit down and have daddy-daughter talks. Or just chill out together, be it watching cartoons together or just go for a walk in park with her bike. (Male, interview response)

We're cooking and playing together. I'm listening and interacting more. (Female, survey response)

Outcomes from the program concerning the ability to co-parent and better communication with the other parent were not as strongly reported in either the survey or interview data. When asked if there had been an improvement in their ability to communicate or productively handle conflict some of the interviewees commented that they had no wish for any type of relationship with the other parent or that nothing could help re-establish a relationship.

The extreme level of animosity makes any meaningful communication difficult. (Male, interview response).

However, responses from parents did indicate changes in behaviour that could have positive outcomes for themselves and their children in the long term. Responses indicated parents were using a range of strategies to decrease inter-parental conflict and which could lead to increased parental cooperation in the future.

Communication book, asking opinions on certain things that affect the children, asking for help when needed. (Female, survey response)

Do not communicate at all except by messaging when needed. (Female, survey response)

Not letting her get on my nerves as much, learning frequently she tries to push my buttons and control my life, and say yeah, rather than get into a heated debate. (Male, interview response)

We actually talk about the kids needs now like civilised parents. (Female, survey response)

Not a good look to be arguing on the station platform. (Male, interview response)

A point to note here is that 95% of the parents had attended KKIM in the last six months and, while they had been separated for up to 10 years, were still experiencing moderate to high levels of conflict. It may be that while the goal of increased parental awareness regarding the impact of conflict on children had been achieved the ongoing nature of a “relationship” (whether positive, negative or neutral) with the other parent was yet to be realised amid the other issues still to be resolved. Some parents expressed frustration that the other parent had not attended the program.

It would be helpful if we were on the same page. (Female, interview response)

The other parent would highly benefit from attending as she refused to talk to anyone and ultimately she is putting my children’s lives and welfare at risk. (Male, interview response)

The major themes from the parents, which were consistent with the themes from the focus groups, concerned increased awareness of the needs of children, improved communication with their children and strategies to manage emotions and conflict situations. While some parents did report better co-parenting or improved relationships between parents, such reports were highly individualised and dependent on contexts (length of separation, age of children, stage of divorce process, involvement of the courts).

The “tools” in the KKIM program

Throughout the KKIM program there is use of metaphors for conflict and conflict resolution and also the use of imagery to illustrate the impact of inter-parental conflict on children. The majority of parents found the metaphors and imagery very useful (Table 8). The metaphor of “Weapons of Mass Destruction” (WMDs) was one that the majority of survey respondents (95%) found either “Useful” or “Very Useful”. Interviewees spoke of WMDs in an almost humorous tone but were able to identify their own behaviours related to the concept and commented frequently on how they had learnt not to “lob bombs” at the other parent. The other frequently mentioned tool within the program was the use of videos, with 94% of parents finding them either “Useful” or “Very Useful”. Interviewees commented on the experience of watching the videos as if they were standing aside and watching their own behaviour. For many, the experience of being able to observe in a detached manner reinforced the negative impact their behaviour was having on their children. The benefit of seeing positive behaviours modelled and of observing alternate methods for handling difficult situations with the other parent was also valued by participants.

TABLE 8: HOW USEFUL WERE THE TOOLS?

	Very useful	Useful	A little useful	Not useful	Didn't understand	Don't remember
The Bridge	32%	42%	11%	5%	5%	5%
WMDs	58%	37%	5%	0%	0%	0%
The Butterfly	33%	56%	6%	6%	0%	0%
Awful scale	37%	37%	11%	11%	0%	5%
DVDs	61%	33%	6%	0%	0%	0%

Structure of the KKIM program

When asked about the structure of the KKIM program (Table 9), a large majority of respondents (95%) felt that the sessions were “About the right length” and 74% said the number of sessions was “About right”. Interestingly there was a small percentage (26%) who said there were too few and who would presumably welcome more sessions. The majority either strongly agreed (67%) or agreed (28%) that they would recommend KKIM to other parents. While Table 4 shows a figure of 5% strongly disagreeing with some aspects of the program, this was actually only one respondent.

TABLE 9: STATEMENTS RELATING TO PROCESS OF KKIM SESSIONS.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The sessions were well delivered	58%	37%	5%	0%
KKIM was well organised	58%	42%	0%	0%
The information presented was clear and easy to understand	53%	47%	0%	0%
The workbook was easy to follow	42%	53%	5%	0%
The homework was helpful	33%	56%	11%	0%
I found hearing from other parents helpful	42%	53%	5%	0%

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The Keeping Kids in Mind (KKIM) program was evaluated using qualitative and quantitative methods to gauge the impact of the program on participants' attitudes, knowledge and behaviours in relation to post-separation parenting. The evaluation gathered qualitative data through focus groups with those involved in the development, facilitation and administration of KKIM as well as the parents who had participated in KKIM. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through the administration of a survey of parent participants. Triangulation of the data was achieved through a review of relevant literature and documents, data from the administrators of KKIM and data from participants in KKIM.

THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF KKIM

As discussed in the first chapter (on literature review) there have been few rigorous, evidence-based evaluations of the range of post-separation programs available in Australia. Additionally, the terminology regarding the length of programs is inaccurate, with "brief" and "long" being used to describe programs of varying lengths without specific quantification of time. A recent review (Burke, et al. 2009) concluded that there were benefits to be had from both brief and longer-term interventions. It would appear that the two-hourly five-week sessions of KKIM are able to deliver the benefits of brief interventions (such as: reducing children's exposure to inter-parental conflict; improving the quality of parent-child relationships; increasing the encouragement of children's relationship with the other parent and longer programs) along with the more personally oriented benefits of longer, skill-based programs (such as: improved parenting skills; enhanced communication and conflict resolution skills). The design of KKIM is consistent with the literature evidence regarding structure, content and orientation.

In general the literature is supportive of post-separation group-work programs for parents experiencing mid to high levels of conflict⁶ and the results of this evaluation indicate that as a group-work program KKIM is meeting its stated aims. The impressions of the facilitators and participants were consistent with each other regarding the benefits of both the content and the process of KKIM, and were also consistent with the broader literature on post-separation parenting programs. The current evaluation found that the group-work structure of KKIM provides for a mixed-gender peer group, wherein experiences and emotions can be normalised, advice and support given and taken, as well as providing opportunities for the formation of supportive networks. The heterogeneity of the group is useful as it allows for the normalisation of a range of reactions and emotions and the program is able to accommodate a variety of people's needs. Participants spoke positively of hearing from other parents and of the comfort the realisation that others had experienced similar

⁶ There have recently been concerns expressed and considerations enunciated for parents in ongoing domestic violence situations and for extremely high levels of conflict (Burke, et al., 2009; Chisholm, 2009). It should be pointed out however that conflicted parents do not attend the same KKIM group, which does in part address safety issues.

problems and emotional reactions often brought them relief and comfort. The practical tips and parenting strategies from other parents were also highly valued.

The content of KKIM provides a balance of education regarding the impact of separation and divorce on children, as well as facilitating the development of post-separation parenting skills, communication and conflict-resolution skills. One of the major points to emerge from both the facilitators and the parents was the powerful impact of the imagery and metaphors used within the program. The writers of the program have developed innovative and effective means for communicating key concepts. The imagery of Weapons of Mass Destruction and The Bridge were two that particularly resonated for parents. It would appear that many of the respondents experienced so-called "ah hah" moments, prompted by the use of the imagery. Facilitators provided examples which were able to corroborate the parent data. The use of a range of learning modalities was identified by the focus group as a strength of KKIM and certainly being able to communicate theoretical concepts through the use of readily accessible means appeared to have high impact on the learning of the participants.

Given the positive outcomes reported by facilitators and parents it is concluded that the program has an effective structure and content. A further benefit is that the length of KKIM (five weeks) allows for relationship building and the development of trust between group members, and also between facilitator and participant, to a point where negative behaviours can be challenged. The facilitators highlighted the importance of the establishment of a positive and supportive situation wherein attitudes and behaviours can be challenged. This is viewed by practitioners as an important aspect of the effectiveness of the group and touches on the therapeutic role of the group process. While KKIM is not promoted as a therapeutic group as such, the structure, content and conduct of the group program clearly support a level of intrapersonal development. The balance between therapy and education is one which the facilitators would appear to constantly monitor. This is further discussed in the following section.

The conduct of the KKIM program received high praise from the participants who found the facilitators to be warm and supportive as well as instructive. This highlights the importance of KKIM being conducted by people with relevant qualifications and experience, as well as those who have suitable training in the program. Implicit within the discussion in the focus groups concerning the conduct of KKIM and the process of facilitating the groups was the high level of skill and well-tuned sensitivity of the facilitators who were able to recognise and effectively deal with crucial personal moments of individual group members. This also highlights the ability of the facilitators to manage individual learning within a group setting which was then beneficial for both the individual and the wider group. Such crucial moments of individual learning could easily be overlooked or mismanaged in a group, particularly if there is only one facilitator, and highlights the importance to the group process of having two facilitators conducting the group. This point is further discussed in "Implications for practice" (below).

IMPACT OF KKIM

Overall, the data indicate that attendance at KKIM increases the knowledge of parents regarding the impact of separation and divorce on children and has a positive impact on parental behaviours.

The majority of the parents identified “keeping the needs of kids in mind” as one of the primary outcomes of attending the program and spoke of how this knowledge had helped them to moderate their attitudes towards the other parent. Recognition of the importance of the other parent and decreasing inter-parental conflict is strongly supported in the literature as major factors in a child’s positive adjustment to the separation and divorce of parents. Gaining knowledge about the impact of separation and divorce on children and the value of both parents remaining actively involved in a child’s life would appear to assist parents to make changes in their behaviours, particularly those related to involvement in conflict with the other parent in front of the children. While an improvement in co-parenting behaviours was not as strongly indicated in the data from the parents, it could reasonably be assumed that provided the short-term behaviour changes were maintained then other, longer-term improvements in inter-parental relationships may eventuate.

The literature is supportive of post-separation parenting programs that are a combination of knowledge acquisition (i.e. information-based) and skill development. This evaluation has found that KKIM fulfils these dual roles very well. The program is educative, facilitating the growth of knowledge related to the impact of divorce on children, as well as being developmental, in that parents learn a range of skills and strategies related to conflict avoidance, conflict resolution and post-separation parenting. Implicit in the changes in behaviour noted by facilitators and participants is the personal growth that many parents appear to undergo during the program. In this KKIM has a therapeutic function, particularly in relation to helping parents putting aside their own needs and learning to focus on the needs of their children. The therapeutic aspect of the program was discussed during the focus groups. While the aims and content of KKIM do not frame the program within the traditions of group therapy (indeed, the writers are quite clear that KKIM is not therapy) the therapeutic role that the facilitators, the content of the program and the group processes play cannot be overlooked, nor underrated. This point is discussed further in “Implications”.

Part of the therapeutic role is that attendance at KKIM would appear to encourage personal growth in other areas. For instance, the impact of the program on parents’ more general parenting skills, and the commensurate increase in overall confidence, was a theme in the parents’ responses. Of course separation and divorce do impact negatively on individuals’ self-concepts and levels of confidence, so it is not surprising that participants are reassured through attendance at KKIM and this serves to further emphasise the therapeutic role of the program.

Another point to emerge from both the facilitators and the parents regarded follow up to the program. From the parents there was no clear-cut agreement regarding the desire or need for follow up; some parents said they felt no need for any further courses while several interviewees commented that they had attended other programs related to parenting and conflict resolution subsequent to attendance at KKIM.⁷ As is noted elsewhere, the circumstances of parents, made

⁷ It should be noted that two interviewees had attended several programs but could not recall the order in which they attended the programs. The benefits had become intertwined and their views regarding the impact of the programs were for the accumulation of the programs rather than for individual interventions.

generalising beyond individual contexts very difficult. While any enhancement of parenting skills is clearly a positive outcome for both parent and children, it does raise the question of pre-existing levels of parenting capability prior to attendance at KKIM and the need for facilitator awareness and sensitivity. This is discussed further in the following section.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The practice implications that can be drawn from the results fall into three broad areas: those related to the facilitators and the implementation of KKIM; implications for further development of the documentation of KKIM (the manual itself) and future directions for the program; and considerations for enhancing the benefits to parents from attendance at a KKIM program.

Facilitators and ongoing implementation of KKIM

From the results of the current evaluation of KKIM it can be concluded that the program is well researched and innovative. KKIM also addresses an important ongoing issue within modern society and to date the program has been conducted by well-trained and highly skilled facilitators. Given the strong positive results it would seem that one of the keys to maintaining the integrity of the program is the ability of facilitators to deliver high-quality presentation, in combination with highly developed counselling and group-work skills. The combination of skills required for effective implementation of KKIM is further reason to consider the importance of co-facilitation of groups. While the gender of the facilitators did not appear to be a factor in successful implementation the combination of skills in program delivery, theoretical knowledge, counselling and group work does make the use of two facilitators in the delivery of KKIM a matter of great importance. While staffing issues undoubtedly impact on how KKIM is delivered in various locations the advantages in terms of participants' knowledge, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes would seem to outweigh other considerations.

It was noted by the evaluation team that the participants in the staff focus groups (particularly the writing team and the facilitators from the various agencies) appeared to relish the opportunity to discuss not only the content and structure of KKIM but also the process of facilitating the program. An element of professional development emerged within the focus group as facilitators discussed various points related to group management: the importance of letting participants sit with uncomfortable thoughts or feelings and how these crucial moments could be best handled within a group setting; the management of reluctant or hostile participants; and the emotional impact of some groups on both facilitators and participants. As has been stated previously in this report the facilitation of KKIM is a highly skilled process. It is therefore suggested that a method for maintaining the integrity of the program, and also for providing professional development to personnel with a range and depth of skills, would be through six-monthly or yearly meetings of facilitators. Such meetings could assist in quality control of delivery of the program through the sharing of experiences and discussion related to specific aspects of KKIM, and at the same time would also provide a vehicle for the development of individuals' practices.

Implications for future development of the KKIM manual and program

Part of the focus groups focused on facilitators' feedback regarding the content and structure of the KKIM program. The following points are made in light of those comments and a review of the draft facilitator's manual undertaken by the evaluation team.

- An introduction to the manual is required. This should provide a theoretical and research-based context for the development of the program along with identification of best-practice principles related to post-separation parenting program.
- The program requires articulation of the overall aims as well as clarification of objectives for individual sessions. This would in part address the tension between the education, skill development and therapeutic aspects of the program. It would provide a clear direction for future facilitators of the program and would place parameters on the expectations of both presenters and participants regarding the amount of change and quality of outcomes that can realistically be expected from a five-week program.
- The manual requires further design work to ensure consistency of presentation, clarification of some of the concepts to be communicated to parents, and resolution of copyright issues regarding some images and diagrams. The layout needs to be easily navigable in order to enhance the ease and flow of presentation. Other more specific points from the facilitators are summarised in Table 4.
- A standardised evaluation format is required. The evaluation should allow for the development of short-term goals that may be set by the parent alone or in conjunction with other support staff (if appropriate) and should be amendable for use in longer-term follow up. Other points regarding evaluation are discussed in the following section.
- Other areas for consideration in the longer-term development of the program include: appropriate methods for gauging the impact of the program on children; ways in which children's voices might be included in evaluations of the program; and further research and evaluation regarding the impact of the program on the behaviour of parents who are court-ordered to attend the program compared with those who are not.

Implications for enhancing the benefit to parents

Clarifying the overall aims of KKIM and the individual sessions (as mentioned above) is crucial if both facilitators and participants are to have realistic and achievable goals. Given the wide variation in the attitudes and knowledge of the participants in KKIM it is important for the program to be able to meet a diversity of needs. The group-work situation does allow for a degree of individualisation of the program and certainly the skill of the facilitators in responding to the needs of individuals was an outstanding theme in this evaluation. A suggestion for further individuation is in the evaluation of the program. As shown in Appendix 4, it could be possible for individuals to set their own goals at the beginning of the program and to then reflect on those goals at the end. It is possible that the goals could be kept private but the reflections on progress towards the goals could be shared (if appropriate) with the group. The progress towards the goals could form part of the

process of closure for individuals as the group ends, as well as being a mechanism through which facilitators could discuss plans for the “next step” in individual’s post-separation lives. A further point here is that the group context has the capacity to provide a “reflective space” for some participants. Burke et al. (2009) comment that while the material in some programs may be familiar to participants it is the actual attendance at a facilitated group which provides “time out” from the demands of family and friends who may be maintaining a particular stance regarding the former partner and permits an honest appraisal of the behaviour of the individual. This further reinforces the importance of recognition of the diversity of needs of participants and the potential benefit for the setting of individual goals.

It is recognised that KKIM is designed specifically as a post-separation parenting program for those experiencing mid to high levels of conflict. As such there are intake and assessment procedures undertaken by the individual agencies. However, those processes were not reviewed as part of this evaluation and as such pre-existing levels of anger or conflict are not known. What is clear is that the facilitators, as part of their group management skills, are able to manage reluctant and often angry parents very well and that initial reluctance can be overcome as part of the group experience. This of course provides is an excellent outcome for the participants.

Another point is that often only one parent attends KKIM. Comments from the participants indicate degrees of frustration when individuals felt that they had achieved changes in knowledge and attitude but these were not shared by their former partner. While recognising that many of these comments are contextual, a suggestion for addressing this issue may be an information sheet that could be given or even posted to the other parent that simply summarises the main points of KKIM regarding the impact of separation and divorce on children and the benefits of co-parenting.

While some respondents had sought other group programs and/or attended individual counselling either prior to or subsequent to attendance at KKIM, not all parent respondents indicated the need or desire for follow up to KKIM; indeed, some interviewees were unsure about differentiating between the programs they had attended. It may be that a clear sequence of programs might be of benefit, with identified pathways for those who choose to do more. The facilitators also discussed the broad range of ongoing needs of participants and did identify the importance of group members being made aware of other support programs and networks that could be available to them. It was suggested that as part of the group closure process suggestions about where to go for other support or what to do next could be started in Session 4 rather than left to the final session.

CONCLUSIONS

While the number of parent participants in this evaluation was small, the positive consensus of their responses does support the conclusion that KKIM is an effective post-separation parenting program. Triangulation of the data was available through the literature review, the staff focus groups and the parent participants.

The need for ongoing process evaluation, as well as rigorous, longitudinal evaluation of behavioural change in participants is strongly recommended. As has been noted previously within this report, the inclusion of children's voices within evaluations of KKIM would make a strong contribution to understanding the extent of the impact of the program on the post-separation lives of families. Suggestions for evaluation formats (for both individual sessions and for parental outcomes from the program) have been made (Appendices 4a, 4b, 4c). While these suggestions do not explicitly include children's voices, the concept of parent-determined goals could lead to more explicit discussion of the concrete benefits to children flowing from the program. It might then be possible to provide a format or even a script to encourage parents to discuss personal and family outcomes of the program with their children (with due consideration for the development stages of the children). Furthermore, ongoing evaluation would not only contribute to the overall efficacy of the program but would also contribute to research in the area of evaluation of post-separation parenting programs in Australia. Standardisation of intake procedures across the agencies involved with KKIM, coupled with standardised short-term process evaluation of the program and longer-term behavioural outcome evaluation, would enhance the potential of KKIM to address the complexity of issues confronting parents enduring separation and divorce.

The delicate interconnections between program content, structure and group facilitation cannot be overemphasised and this raises questions regarding further dissemination of the KKIM program. In order to maintain the integrity of KKIM there is the need to ensure that the program is delivered by appropriately qualified and suitably trained facilitators. The method and process for providing suitable training is of course another area to explore.

In conclusion, the KKIM group-work program is a well-constructed program which addresses crucial emotional and behavioural issues confronted by families in the post-separation period. The parent participants in this study reported that the processes and content within the KKIM program contributed to increases in both their self-efficacy and parental-efficacy. The program has strong theoretical foundations and is based on best practice principles derived from the research literature. The positive responses from parent participants would indicate that the program is able to successfully translate theoretical constructs regarding child welfare in the post-separation period into practical personal and parental strategies, which must ultimately positively impact on the lives of children.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1	Focus group draft schedule
APPENDIX 2	Keeping Kids in Mind: Parent Survey
APPENDIX 3	Interview schedule for parents
APPENDIX 4A	Draft Weekly Evaluation Form for Keeping Kids in Mind participants
APPENDIX 4B	Draft Pre-Evaluation Form for Keeping Kids in Mind participants
APPENDIX 4C	Draft Post-Evaluation Form for Keeping Kids in Mind participants

APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP DRAFT SCHEDULE

1. Greeting.
2. Ensure they understand purpose of study and have information statement.
3. Do you have any questions about the project?
4. Check consent form.
5. What is your role in relation to KKIM?
6. What is your involvement with KKIM?
7. What do you feel are the strengths of the program?
8. Are you aware of any issues that have arisen with KKIM?
9. Are there any aspects of KKIM that you would change: e.g. in the content; the structure; the facilitation?
10. What are your perceptions regarding the impact of KKIM on participants':
 - a. knowledge regarding co-parenting?
 - b. attitudes to co-parenting with their ex-partner?
 - c. behaviour related to co-parenting?
11. What types of feedback have you had regarding the impact of KKIM on the children of families?
12. Are there any questions you would like us to ask participants about KKIM?
13. Is there anything else you would like to say?
14. Would you like a copy of the report?

APPENDIX 2: KEEPING KIDS IN MIND: PARENT SURVEY

SECTION 1

1.1 *Could you please give us some information about yourself?*

Gender: Male Female

Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? Yes No

Do you identify with another cultural background? Yes No

Please state: _____

Age of children: _____

How long since you separated from your children's other parent? _____

1.2 *Could you please tell us about how you came to attend KKIM?*

How did you find out about the course? _____

Did Court ask you to attend the group? Yes No

Where did you attend group? _____

How long ago did you attend group? 0–6 months 6–12 months 12–18 months

Did you complete the course? Yes No

Sections 2 and 3 ask what you learnt from KKIM and the effect it had on your behaviour.

SECTION 2: PLEASE CIRCLE THE ANSWER WHICH BEST DESCRIBES YOUR RESPONSE.

As a result of KKIM:

2.1 I have a better understanding of how conflict impacts on my children.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.2 I have a better understanding of how grief and loss impacts on my children.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.3 I am focusing more on my children's needs.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.4 I have a better understanding of my own behaviour related to dealing with conflict.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.5 I have better understanding of my own behaviour related to dealing with grief and loss.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.6 I am not as defensive with the other parent.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.7 I am better at dealing with conflict with the other parent.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.8 I am better at coping with my own grief and loss.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.9 I am better at communicating with the other parent.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.10 I am less stressed when dealing with the other parent.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.11 The other parent and I are now making better joint decisions.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.12 I have a better understanding of the importance of the other parent.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.13 I feel I have more confidence in co-parenting my children.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2.14 My children have noticed a positive change in me since I attended KKIM

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

SECTION 3: PLEASE WRITE A SHORT ANSWER IN THE SPACE PROVIDED.

As a result of KKIM:

3.1 What are you doing differently in parenting your child (e.g. what new skills are you using)?

3.2. What are you doing differently in working with the other parent (e.g. what new skills are you using)?

3.3 How have your children benefitted from your attending KKIM?

SECTION 4 WILL ASK YOU ABOUT THE KKIM SESSIONS AND THE ACTIVITIES.

Please circle the answer which best describes your response.

4.1 Were the sessions: Too Long Too Short About Right

4.2 The number of sessions were: Too Many Too Few About Right

4.3. The sessions were well delivered:

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4.4 KKIM was well organised:

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4.5. The information presented was clear and easy to understand:

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4.6. The workbook was easy to follow:

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4.7. The homework was helpful:

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4.8. I found hearing from other parents helpful:

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4.9. I would recommend KKIM to other parents:

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4.10 How useful were the following tools:

Please tick the box which best describes how useful you found the tool)

	VERY USEFUL	USEFUL	A LITTLE USEFUL	NOT USEFUL	I DIDN'T UNDERST AND IT	I DON'T REMEMB ER IT
THE BRIDGE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION (WMDs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
THE BUTTERFLY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
THE AWFUL SCALE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
THE VIDEOS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION 5: PLEASE WRITE A SHORT ANSWER IN THE SPACE PROVIDED.

5.1 Have you attended any other groups, mediation or similar since completing KKIM?

Yes No

If Yes, please tell us about it.

5.2 Have your views of your children's other parent changed? Yes No

If Yes, please tell us about it _____

5.3 Would you have liked some follow up to KKIM Yes No

If Yes, do you have any suggestions? _____

5.4 I received useful information from KKIM before it started? Yes No

If No, do you have any suggestions? _____

5.5 What are the strengths of KKIM? _____

5.6 What did you find most useful in KKIM? _____

5.7 How could KKIM be improved? _____

5.8 Is there anything else you would like to say about KKIM? _____

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS

The interview will be semi-structured to allow for exploration of themes arising from the previously completed survey and any new material coming from the interview itself. The questions below will form the basis of the interview but the interview may range over wider topics and concerns as a result of participant responses.

OPENING STATEMENT

I'm interested in hearing about your experiences of doing the Keeping Kids in Mind program and in this interview I would like to discuss your thoughts about the program, what you might be doing differently and the impact the program has had on yourself, your children and the other parent.

I would like to remind you that participation in this interview is voluntary and that the interview will be recorded. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point with no penalty or repercussions for yourself. Do I have your permission to record the interview? You may also receive a transcript of the interview should you wish and you have the right to ask for alterations and edits to the transcript.

- Question 1: Were there particular aspects of KKIM that you found useful?
 Can you describe these please?
- Question 2: Are there any changes you'd make to the program?
- Question 3: Have you noticed any changes in yourself since completing KKIM?
 What might these be?
- Question 4: How have you changed in terms of parenting your children?
- Question 5: Have you noticed any changes in your children's behaviour?
 Can you describe these please?
- Question 6: Have there been any changes in your relationship with the other parent?

 Can you describe these please?
- Question 7: Are there any comments you would like to make about the content
 of the program or the facilitators?
- Question 8: Is there anything else you would like to add?

CLOSING STATEMENT

Thank you for your time today. This interview will be transcribed and then analysed. A report will be prepared for the agencies any material in the report will not be identifiable or linked to you in any way. Would you like to receive a copy of the transcript?

APPENDIX 4A: DRAFT WEEKLY EVALUATION FORM FOR KEEPING KIDS IN MIND PARTICIPANTS

SESSION EVALUATION FORM

DATE _____ SESSION _____

*We value your input and feedback on the Keeping Kids in Mind Parenting Course.
In regards to this session;*

1. Please mark where you would place yourself on the following scales:

What did you think of the session overall? | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
Not Helpful Satisfactory Good Great

What did you think of the information in this session? | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
Not Helpful Satisfactory Good Great

What did you think of how the session was run? | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
Not Helpful Satisfactory Good Great

2. What was the most useful part of this session?

3. What was the least useful part of this session?

4. Due to this session what might you do differently with your child/ren?

5. Due to this session what might you do differently with the other parent?

APPENDIX 4B: DRAFT PRE-EVALUATION FORM FOR KEEPING KIDS IN MIND PARTICIPANTS

PRE EVALUATION FORM DATE _____

1. Please mark where you would place yourself on the following scales:

a. How would you rate your understanding of how conflict impacts on your children?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
b. How would you rate your understanding of how you deal with conflict?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
c. How would you rate your understanding of how grief and loss impacts on your children?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
d. How would you rate your ability to communicate with the other parent?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
e. How would you rate your ability to make joint decisions with the other parent?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
f. How would you rate the level of stress when dealing with the other parent?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Low Medium High
g. How do you feel you are coping with your stress level?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Not Well Managing Very Well

2. This section is just for you. You do not have to show it to anyone else.

This course will offer you information and ideas for doing things differently, particularly around helping your children and your relationship with their other parent. Think about what you might like to do differently as a result of this course. *(Please use over page if you require more space)*

What goals would you like to achieve by the end of this course in relation to YOURSELF?

What goals would you like to achieve by the end of this course in relation to YOUR CHILDREN?

What goals would you like to achieve by the end of this course in relation to the OTHER PARENT?

APPENDIX 4C: DRAFT POST-EVALUATION FORM FOR KEEPING KIDS IN MIND PARTICIPANTS

PRE EVALUATION FORM DATE _____

Having attended KKIM circle where you would now place yourself on the following scales:

a. How would you rate your understanding of how conflict impacts on your children?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
b. How would you rate your understanding of how you deal with conflict?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
c. How would you rate your understanding of how grief and loss impacts on your children?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
d. How would you rate your ability to communicate with the other parent?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
e. How would you rate your ability to make joint decisions with the other parent?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Beginning Developing Strong
f. How would you rate the level of stress when dealing with the other parent?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Low Medium High
g. How do you feel you are coping with your stress level?	1 _____ _____ 5 _____ _____ 10
	Not Well Managing Very Well

2. On the scales below, please circle if or how your skills have changed since attending KKIM.

a. My ability to focus on my child's needs has changed. 1 _____ | _____ 5 _____ | _____ 10
 About the same A little A lot

What are you doing differently? _____

b. I am not as defensive with the other parent. 1 _____ | _____ 5 _____ | _____ 10
 Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What are you doing differently? _____

c. My ability to deal with conflict with the other parent has changed. 1 _____ | _____ 5 _____ | _____ 10
 Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What are you doing differently? _____

d. My ability to cope with my own grief and loss has changed. 1 _____ | _____ 5 _____ | _____ 10
About the same A little A lot
What are you doing differently? _____

e. My ability to communicate with the other parent has changed. 1 _____ | _____ 5 _____ | _____ 10
Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
What are you doing differently? _____

f. My ability to make joint decisions the other parent has changed. 1 _____ | _____ 5 _____ | _____ 10
Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
What are you doing differently? _____

3. Think about the goals you set yourself at the beginning of the course.

To what extent do you feel you have reached those goals?

Can you tell us a bit about that, in relation to:

YOURSELF?

YOUR CHILDREN?

THE OTHER PARENT?

EVALUATION OF THE
KEEPING KIDS IN MIND
GROUP WORK PROGRAM

REPORT PREPARED BY:
THE FAMILY ACTION CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE, NSW