

Week 6: Promoting leadership in Indigenous communities

Ellen is participating in the Manage Your Income, Manage Your Life program launched in February 2004 by Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes and supported by Caritas Australia. Ellen is a Wiradjuri woman and lives in Dubbo with her husband, four children and four siblings.

Wilcannia-Forbes Centacare's Manage Your Income, Manage Your Life program is a financial management program designed specifically for Indigenous communities. The program promotes leadership and aims to create community role models who in turn teach income management skills to others within the community.

Many Aboriginal communities face major social problems including widespread poverty, low self-esteem, substance abuse and unemployment of young and middle aged adults.

The key goal of the Manage Your Income, Manage Your Life program is to teach basic skills in budgeting. The program focuses on building self-esteem, supporting individuals to set goals and providing training in budgeting. The program highlights the need to prepare for the uncertainties and pressures of life and emphasises the importance of savings.

Ellen is a leader in her community and she acts as a mentor and nurturer to help women and children reach their potential. Ellen is a voluntary community worker at Apollo House, a community centre in Dubbo where she assists with a literacy program that encourages students to read. She also serves as a grief counsellor and a child supervisor during the school holidays.

The Manage Your Income, Manage Your Life program has helped Ellen to create structure in her life by teaching her how to set goals and prioritise how she spends her time and money.

"People in the community indicated they wanted to learn to budget because when you have little money your whole life gets turned upside down if you have any financial problem," said Ellen.

"In the program we all feel safe enough to talk openly about money. We learn how to write a shopping list and we now understand that we should avoid making impulse purchases. I've learned it's not how much money you earn, it's what you do with it."

Ellen now plans the weekly meals and there is no impulse buying. She is very organised and plans for pay day, looking at what bills need to be paid and how much money she has to work with.

When asked about the benefits of being involved in Manage Your Income, Manage Your Life, Ellen says, "It has empowered us to look after ourselves. It has helped me to look at the way I'm handling things in my life and to see where I need to make changes to go forward."

The Manage Your Income program in East Dubbo is coordinated by Indigenous woman Lynda Edwards from

Narromine, who with Caritas Australia's support is studying to become an accredited financial counsellor.

The program has provided participants with new skills and increased confidence. It has assisted them to make better decisions about their lives and according to Ellen has opened their minds to new ways of thinking.

Your donation to Project Compassion will support the development of Indigenous communities like Ellen's.



PHOTO:
DANIELLE
LYONNE