

Child Safety under Scrutiny: The Rural Child Safety Project

Carolyn Zanker

Country life may not be as healthy for children as we would like to think. More rural children under five years of age die as the result of accidents than their city counterparts.

To raise awareness of this problem, the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia is conducting a Rural Child Safety Project with the Southern Mallee Councils Group in Victoria over a twelve month period. The project was launched in Swan Hill on 21 August 1991 by the Hon. Caroline Hogg, Minister for Ethnic, Municipal and Community Affairs. The launch took place at a local Primary School and was attended by local government representatives and community leaders.

The project, which is fully funded by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and Better Health Victoria, covers five municipalities. These include the Shire and City of Swan Hill, the Shire and Borough of Kerang and the Shire of Wycheproof. The project aims to raise community awareness of the hazards rural children face, and to help parents prevent injuries from occurring to their children.

The launch proved to be extremely successful. The highlight of the morning was when Ms Hogg and a group of primary school children took part in a giant, colourful snakes and ladders game which focused on safe play issues.

Ms Carolyn Zanker is the Project Officer for the Rural Child Safety Project.

What is the Rural Child Safety Project?

The Rural Child Safety Project is an initiative of the Victorian Division of the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia. The twelve month project has been funded by Better Health Victoria and the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, with in-kind support from the Shire of Swan Hill.



Hon. Caroline Hogg at the launch of the Rural Child Safety Project.

The Project is based in the Shire of Swan Hill and also encompasses the City of Swan Hill, the Shire and Borough of Kerang and the Shire of Wycheproof.

What are the Project's Objectives?

The Rural Child Safety Project aims to reduce rural child injuries in the project area by:

- * increasing what is known about rural child safety issues locally
- * developing a community based model for determining child accident prevention strategies appropriate for rural settings.

Who will the Project target?

The Rural Child Safety Project will primarily target parents of children aged 0-5 since this age is the one most at risk. Rural children aged 5 and under are more likely to die as a result of accidental injury than their city counterparts, except in the case of drowning in backyard pools. Older children also face increased risks, especially on farms where home is

also the workplace. The need for older children to participate in farm work also increases their risk of injury. Farm machinery, particularly tractors, are a hazard to rural children of all ages.

Lack of understanding about the link between child development and risk of injury means that the belief that exposing children to these hazards can toughen them, and so protect them from harm, is

widespread. Fathers in particular, have limited access to child safety information.

The Rural Child Safety Project will aim to reach as many different groups in the project area as possible, in order to increase access to this information and help parents to develop realistic expectations of their children.

Rural children aged 5 and under are more likely to die as a result of accidental injury than their city counterparts, except in the case of drowning in backyard pools.

By working with these groups to identify hazards in their homes and on their farms, the project aims to find suitable ways for families to protect children from these dangers, without unnecessarily comprising the dual roles of caregiving and farmworking.

The Rural Child Safety Project combines the accident prevention knowledge of the Foundation with the local support of the Shire of Swan Hill and community knowledge about local hazards and lifestyles. The Project hopes to encourage local community networks involved in children's services and other groups to take an active role in raising community awareness of rural child safety issues.

How will it be Conducted?

The Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia (Victorian Division) will conduct the program through the Project Officer (Ms Carolyn Zanker) who will be based at the Shire of Swan Hill offices.

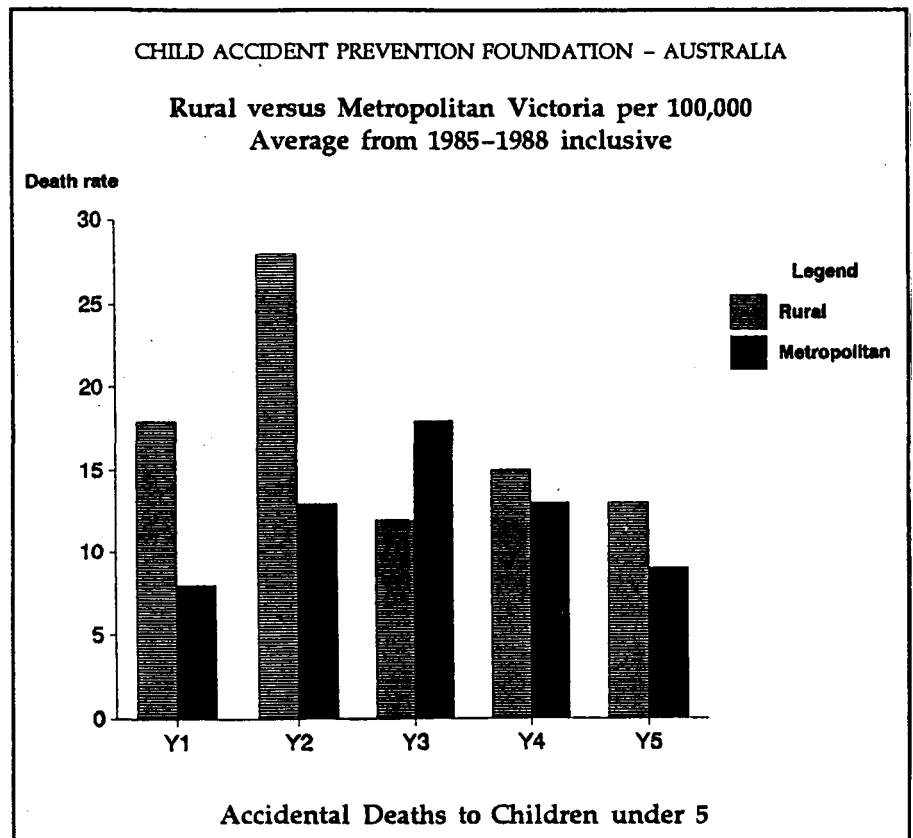
The Project will consist of a survey of local parents and the monitoring of injury presentations to Swan Hill and District Hospital to determine local child injury patterns, as well as using information from the Victorian Injury Surveillance System and other related data bases.

Raising rural child safety issues is a matter of concern to many groups who have a shared responsibility in providing for children's safety.

This information will be used to develop local community workshops and events to highlight effective ways of reducing child injury levels in the project area.

The Reference Group

To achieve wide dissemination of child safety information, local groups are being asked to act as a Reference Group for the project. The Reference Group will meet about three times throughout the project to assist the Project Officer with suggestions on appropriate ways to reach target groups, identify local events where



information could be provided and suggest linkages that could be made with the wider community. In this way, it is hoped to use local knowledge to ensure that the project is both relevant to the needs of local children and accessible to those responsible for their care.

Expected Outcomes

It is hoped that the project will contribute to knowledge about rural child safety in Victoria. This is the first project of its kind in this state and so provides a challenging opportunity to increase our understanding of how rural child injuries can be reduced.

The processes and materials developed throughout the project will not only benefit the Southern Mallee, but may well provide a model for other rural communities.

Raising rural child safety issues is a matter of concern to many groups who have a shared responsibility in providing for children's safety. The high level of media interest in this project demonstrates the potential for broader application of what we can learn together through this project.

Finally and most importantly, the Rural Child Safety Project provides an opportunity to make changes which will protect our most valuable resource - Victoria's children.

How the Project will operate

The project will be managed by the Victorian Division of the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia, with the day to day functions being supervised by the Shire of Swan Hill.

Dr Jamieson from the Latrobe University College of Northern Victoria will conduct the evaluation of the project and report on its success.

Ms Carolyn Zanker as Project Officer will carry out the information collection and dissemination, as well as planning and conducting the workshops and local events to highlight particular issues. Carolyn will be the contact person for the project in the local area.

Further information on the project can be obtained from Carolyn at the Shire of Swan Hill, PO Box 488, Swan Hill 3585. Telephone: (050) 320 333.