



Charles Sturt
University

The Family Empowerment Program



Supporting Rural Families Affected by Substance Use

We are pleased to share the latest update on the Family Empowerment Program, a research initiative led by the Charles Sturt University Rural Health Research Institute. This study focuses on supporting families affected by substance use in rural Australia.

Background:

The Family Empowerment Program, supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, is designed to help families in rural Australia affected by a loved one's substance use. This program commenced in 2023 and will conclude in June 2025.

This study is the first in Australia to offer the Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT) model as a virtual program, making vital support more accessible to rural families. For this research, CRAFT has been renamed the Family Empowerment Program to better reflect its focus on strengthening family relationships and resilience.

What We've Learned

Participants have shared powerful stories of personal growth, improved coping skills, and stronger relationships. However, many also emphasised the need for stronger links to family support services and highlighted the ongoing stigma around substance use. These insights will help shape future support systems for families facing similar challenges.

"This particular program doesn't exist. And it needs to exist. And this needs to be something that everyone has access to. When a family member goes into any kind of programming. You're left like that. All of the focus is on the person who's unwell. There's nothing that supports the aftermath." -
Family Empowerment Program participant.

How the Program Works

Eligible participants residing in rural Australia who were affected by a loved one's substance use had the opportunity for six free one-hour sessions with a trained psychologist. The core of the program focused on equipping participants with new skills, enabling them to change how they interact with and support their loved ones while also learning to prioritise their own well-being and self-care. Most participants accessed their sessions online, making it easier for those in remote areas to connect with trained professionals. This flexible, virtual approach ensures families can get the support they need, no matter where they live.

What's Next

As our research nears completion, we're committed to using these findings to push for better services for rural families. To help share this knowledge, we're launching a podcast series in May 2025, where experts, participants, and researchers will discuss key insights and real experiences. We would love for you to join us as we discuss important topics related to supporting families impacted by substance use.

Meet the Research Team



Professor Julaine Allan



Dr Nicole Snowdon



Heidi Gray
PhD Candidate

We encourage you to share these updates with others who may find them valuable. If you have any questions or would like to learn more, don't hesitate to reach out.

Thank you for being part of this journey!

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