

# Preventing Child Abuse: A Way Forward

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# Australian child protection trends

2001-2002

2005-2006

Children in care 18,880

25,454

...The Titanic heading toward the iceberg at an increasing rate of knots.



# Parental Substance Dependence

- England & Wales: 2-3% of all children have a drug dependent parent
- Scotland: 5-6% of all children have a drug dependent parent
- In Australia no prevalence data but up to two thirds of children in care have at least one parent with an alcohol and/or drug dependence



# Child abuse – an adult health problem

Strong correlation between adult health and mental health outcomes and growing up in a household with:

- recurrent physical abuse
- recurrent emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- incarcerated household member
- someone who is chronically depressed, suicidal, institutionalised or mentally ill
- mother being treated violently
- one or no parents
- emotional or physical neglect

Adverse Childhood Experiences Study on Adult Health and Well-being by Kaiser Permanente's Department of Preventive Medicine and Center for Disease Control



# Child abuse and neglect – a child health, education and juvenile justice problem

Low birth weight

Child behaviour problems

Low literacy

Non-completion of school

Juvenile crime

Drug use

Teenage pregnancy

Durlak (1998) Common risk factors and protective factors in successful prevention programs, American Jnl of Orthopsychiatry, 68, 512-520



# Common risk factors

- Poor early parent-child attachment
- Low peer and school connectedness
- Little social support
- Parental poverty

Durlak (1998) Common risk factors and protective factors in successful prevention programs, *American Jnl of Orthopsychiatry*, 68, 512-520



# Trends in Policy Responses

Population-based, whole-of government strategy of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention to address inter-related risk factors early in the causal pathways



# Challenges to whole of government approaches and strategies

- ***Jurisdiction/domain***: elevate the ownership of the problem and responsibility for the solution
- ***Time scale***: develop interim performance measures rather than rigid outcomes
- ***Budget process***: multi-lateral budget bids, budget pooling, outcome not output focus

(Adam Graycar, Public Policy: Core Business and By-Products, Public Administration Today, July-September 2006, p.6-1-)



# UK Examples

## ***“Sure Start”***

- early childhood interventions in high need neighbourhoods

## ***“Every Child Matters”***

- Legal requirement on agencies to work together for vulnerable children
- Common assessment framework
- Common performance indicators
- Pooling of budgets
- Establish Children’s Trusts in LGAs
- Inspectorate model of accountability



# Promising Approaches

- Universal and targeted nurse family home visiting with cross-sector focus
- Early childhood education and care centres with family outreach focus
- Indigenous initiatives



# Nurse Home Visiting

SA Family Home Visiting Service – all families receive initial home visit and 12% of most at risk families are offered 2 years of nurse home visiting.

Early evaluations are very promising with nearly 80% of families accepting the service.



# Early Childhood Education and Care

High quality child care is an effective intervention for neglected children. It can also provide support to parents and refer families to other services.

SDN Children's Services has pioneered "family centred practice" in this field.



# Indigenous Initiatives

- Homemaker programs in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, SA
- Early literacy program in Napranum, Qld
- Mums and Babies program, Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service

Lessons?



# Strategies in Adult Tertiary Services

- Enhanced capacity for adult mental health services to respond to the needs of children of parents with a mental illness (eg COPMI)
- Enhanced capacity for drug treatment services to respond to the needs of children of parents with substance dependence eg Odyssey House, Vic





# Father friendly services

The Family Action Centre at the University of Newcastle has pioneered father friendly practice in Australia through its mens and Boys programs, from ante-natal through to primary schools



# Sowing the Seeds of Innovation

- Innovation
- Evaluation
- Dissemination
- Transplantation



# Is the fruit ripe for “scaling up”?

- effectiveness
- efficiency
- sustainability
- transferability



## **and last but not least - hope**

“Institutions of hope refer to sets of rules, norms and practices that ensure that we have some room not only to dream of the extraordinary but also to do the extraordinary.”

(Braithwaite, 2004)



