



Profiles of child abuse prevention programs

In 2002, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse is attempting to encourage agencies running child abuse prevention programs to write a short piece about the programs they are running and their experiences of being involved in those programs. As a result of a mail-out to agencies on our Clearinghouse mailing list, and a flier placed on the Clearinghouse web page, we have received information from several agencies, including the three listed below.

If your agency is conducting a child abuse prevention program or service and is interested in making a contribution to future Clearinghouse Newsletters, then we would be delighted to hear from you.



ABUSED CHILD TRUST - CONTACT HOUSE WOOLLOOWIN

80 Kedron Park Rd, Woolloowin, Queensland 4030.
Phone: (07) 3857 8866.

by Fred Gravestock

The Abused Child Trust was established in Brisbane in 1986 by interested human service professionals and community members. The purpose was to advocate for the needs of children, provide therapy services where none had previously existed, and to create child-supportive communities, by being the leading provider of services for the prevention of child abuse and neglect throughout Queensland. The Trust receives 53 per cent of its funding from the State and Commonwealth Governments, and fundraises the rest of the funding which totals 1.25 million dollars.

Contact House is a multidisciplinary intervention service which has been provided to families in Woolloowin (North of Brisbane) since 1990. The trust commenced a part-time counselling service on the Gold Coast in 1999, based in Pacific Fair Shopping Centre. The trust opened a Contact House service in Townsville in April 2002 after receiving funding from the Department of Families.

Contact House is a child protection agency providing therapy, education, health and support intervention for children aged 0–8 years at risk of significant harm. Clients are referred from a number of sources including the Department of Families, Royal Children's Hospital, other community agencies, and via self referrals.

The service at Contact House works with 75 children (from approximately 35

families) at any one time. Due to the complex nature of these problems, the children remain associated with Contact House for extended periods of time (average of 15 months). During 2001, staff at Contact House – Woolloowin provided over 2850 hours of intervention services to 175 children from 73 families.

Services are conducted at the Contact House Centre as well as on a home visitation basis, with all services provided free of charge to clients. Service include:

- **Therapy Program:** Interventions are based upon a thorough understanding of the issues faced by each child and family. Interventions that focus on children include individual counselling (usually play therapy), intellectual, emotional and developmental assessment and intervention. Interventions that specifically focus on parents include: training in child behaviour management, general parenting matters, attachment and bonding with children, individual counselling, anger and stress management and couple counselling and family therapy.
- **Preschool Program:** The preschool provides an educational and therapeutic environment addressing the emotional and developmental needs of children experiencing abuse and neglect. Without specialised assistance, abused and neglected children will enter school with significant social and emotional delays, increasing the likelihood of social and academic failure.
- **Health Program:** The health program recognises that abused and neglected children and their families have special

health needs. Nurses provide a range of services both in the family home and at Contact House, including health screening and assessment, liaise with medial and health service and assists families to better manage children with developmental delays.

- **Family Aide Program:** This program uses volunteers from the local community to work with and support families using services of Contact House. The family aides provide home-based practical and emotional support to families experiencing difficulties in parenting and family life. Each family aide establishes a caring relationship with a family. The time allocated with any family depends on the extent of the family's difficulties, and the time the family aide has available. Generally a family would receive approximately two hours of assistance a week.

In mid 2001, Dr Monika Henderson conducted a comprehensive evaluation of Contact House – Woolloowin. The results highlighted the uniqueness of the multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of child abuse and neglect taken by Contact House, and how such an approach was consistent with the world's best practice. The report also emphasised the effectiveness of the service, with subsequent rates of notifications to the Department of Families decreasing significantly for families who had received intervention from Contact House. Moreover, both clients and referring agents reported high levels of satisfaction with the service, and external agencies commented on the high degree of professionalism of Contact House staff.

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MALEE SEXUAL ASSAULT UNIT – PERSONAL SAFETY SUCCESS TRAINING PROGRAM FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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by Sharon Kerslake

The Personal Safety Success Training (PSST) program is a resource offered to children between the ages of 7–12 years as a preventative measure against abuse. The program assists in promoting and teaching protective behaviours to children and is used widely in the Northern and Southern Mallee Region and borders of New South Wales. The delivery of the program is assisted by funding from the Mildura Rural City Council School Focused Youth Services.

The philosophies behind the Protective Behaviors Program are: children own their bodies and minds; children have the right to set their own boundaries and decide who, when and where their body is touched; children have the right to say “no” to any unwanted or unsafe touching; children must be informed of potential dangers including abuse and taught protective measures to ensure their personal safety; and sexual abuse is never the child’s fault.

Protective behaviours education primarily focuses on prevention and is required because we cannot be with our children every minute of the day. The Program teaches children to trust their intuitions, acknowledge their feelings and act on them. The program also aims to raise the child’s awareness of potentially dangerous situations and teaches

them coping skills to deal with all forms of difficult situations including abuse. The program also gives children and adults permission to talk.

The PSST program is based on the fundamental beliefs: “We all have the right to feel safe all the time”; and “Nothing is so awful we can’t tell someone about it.”

The program discusses general safety, including problem solving exercises followed by introducing student to concepts such as: early warning signs, personal space, boundaries, body ownership, safe/unsafe touches, sexual abuse, safety strategies, safe/unsafe secrets, tricks, threats and bribes, assertive training, safety on the internet, friendships and networks. Even the most safety conscious child cannot always avoid abusive situations; however, children who are well prepared are more likely to tell if abuse has occurred – and this is the child’s best defence. The PSST program teaches children skills coupled with actions that they can take to ensure their personal safety.

After parents, teachers spend more time with children than any other adult; young children place a great deal of trust in their teachers and look to them when they feel unsafe. Therefore, through the PSST program teachers are trained to observe changes in the appearance and progress of individual children. Teachers are encouraged to be sensitive to the fact that students in their class may have experienced abusive situations, directly or indirectly.

The PSST program aims to inform and enlighten rather than frighten children, and is conducted in a positive learning environment. The response from schools has been very positive and children have a wonderful time participating in the program. From January 2000 – June 2001, a total of 436 children attended the program at 12 different primary schools in the Northern and Southern Mallee Region. The Mallee Sexual Assault Unit aims to expand the program across all schools in the Mallee / New South Wales border regions.



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INTERRELATE – CHILDREN’S CONTACT CENTRES

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by Judi West

Interrelate Children’s Contact Centres provide a supervised contact and changeover/changeback service for families unable to resolve conflict around contact visits, following separation. The Centres are safe, well resourced and child focused facilities, staffed by sensitive and qualified professionals.

The philosophy of Interrelate Centres is “To uphold the right of children to contact with their non-residential parent/guardian in a physically and emotionally safe environment”. This is achieved by ensuring that Centres have a unique child focus, where the

program runs independently for children without gathering information for the court. The Centres enable a consistent pattern of contact between children and parents through staff facilitated practices. Staff ensure that parents acknowledge their responsibilities as carers; make sure parents behave respectfully and appropriately toward each other whilst in the company of their children; and discourage disrespectful talk about the other parent.

As a result of Commonwealth funding in 1995, ten Changeover Centres were established in capital cities with funding released in 2000 to establish Contact Centres in country regions. An evaluation of Centres was carried out between 1997–1999 and through this children expressed their delight in being able to see their non-resident

parent while having present an adult they could trust. They also liked being allowed to enjoy their parent while being well supported in a safe environment.

Interrelate acknowledges the anger and frustration of parents and encourages referrals to other services for dealing with the issues that arise following separation. Staff support the movement of families away from Supervised Contact/Changeover/Changeback to self management.

The admission process is formal, and appointments are necessary with all clients being interviewed and asked to sign a Service Agreement. Acceptance of clients is determined by staff according to their suitability and the level of demand on the service. Fees are set on a sliding scale.