

The Australasian Statutory Child Protection Learning and Development Group

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The Australasian Statutory Child Protection Learning and Development Group (the Group) comprises representatives with learning and development responsibilities in every Australian state and territory, and New Zealand. In addition, there are representatives from the Australian Centre for Child Protection (at the University of South Australia) and the National Child Protection Clearinghouse (at the Australian Institute of Family Studies). The Group meets twice a year to:

- facilitate the sharing of training resources;
- discuss approaches to training in each jurisdiction;
- discuss what works and what doesn't work;
- share initiatives and innovation;
- avoid duplication of effort;
- identify commonalities and differences between approaches in different jurisdictions;
- articulate the link between training, and recruitment and retention;
- discuss approaches and strategies for responding to shared problems; and
- support research to facilitate the above goals.

Each meeting is hosted by a different jurisdiction. Historically, the Group arose because representatives from two of the larger jurisdictions (Victoria and New South Wales) saw the need for such a forum. These individuals were the drivers behind the initial meeting. The Group was originally a meeting of state and territory learning and development organisations and was held in conjunction with the Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect.

History of the Australasian Statutory Child Protection Learning and Development Group

In 1999, a Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council (CSMAC) working party investigating human resources and workforce planning issues consulted with the Group in relation to community services training packages and courses on child protection. A National Liaison Officer employed by the CSMAC Secretariat and reporting to the Chair of the Industry Skills Council worked closely with this group and others to develop a national competency set for child protection, youth and welfare workers. At a forum held in December 2001 with the National Liaison Officer, the Learning and Development Group expressed their concerns regarding the 'lumping' of youth and welfare workers into one broad groups and advised that three streams were needed: Youth Work and Juvenile Justice, Child Protection, and Child Care. As a result of such feedback the qualifications were revised to better reflect these streams. The national competencies for statutory child protection workers now form the basis of much of the in-house training provided to statutory child protection workers in Australia.

At the Brisbane meeting of the Group in September 2004 (held in conjunction with the 15th international congress of the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (IPSCAN)), it was decided that the Group would restrict its membership to government agencies and to issues surrounding statutory child protection professional development. Draft terms of reference also emerged from the meeting.

In August 2005, at the Darwin meeting of the Group, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse and Australian Centre for Child Protection were formally included in the membership of the Group. At this meeting it was also determined that a mapping exercise would be completed to document the existing learning and development provisions in each state and territory to further facilitate information and resource sharing.

Outcomes of the group to date

The Group provides an invaluable opportunity to network, share information and benefit from the experiences of others. In addition, the Group has achieved some measurable outcomes, such as:

- a national competency set for statutory child protection workers;
- exchange of training resources between states and territories;
- a staff exchange between Victoria and New Zealand; and
- an audit of existing statutory child protection training provisions in each state and territory.

Preliminary findings from this project were presented at the Australian College of Child and Family Protection Practitioners Conference in Sydney in May 2006.

Future priorities for the Group include further articulation of the link between training, and recruitment and retention; for example, by providing staff with the opportunity to obtain university qualifications and through the development of exchange programs between Australian states and territories. The Group is also investigating the means by which it could promote or support relevant research.

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Conference highlights

Blossoming of Our Children, Kia Puawai Ngā Tamariki

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10th Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect (14–16 February 2006)

In February this year, Dr Daryl Higgins and Dr Leah Bromfield from the Clearinghouse attended the 10th Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect in Wellington, New Zealand, where they gave three presentations. Copies of these papers can be downloaded from the National Child Protection Clearinghouse website www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/presentations.html

Highlights from the conference included the keynote addresses by:

- Professor Dorothy Scott, titled 'Sowing the seeds of innovation', in which Professor Scott challenged conference delegates with the argument that current child protection systems are unsustainable and harmful to children and went on to discuss the four steps which she considered necessary to 'turn the tide' in child protection; and
- Associate Professor Joan Durrant discussed the Swedish child rights perspectives that have shaped that country's corporal punishment laws, and the broader policy context.

Highlights within the concurrent sessions included:

- Tony Stanley's presentation, in which he presented data from his study exploring the constructions of 'risk' in child protection practice;
- a presentation by Mary Ann Carver, Karen Dixon and Margaret Nippert describing a model for interdepartmental collaboration, using South Australia as a case study; and
- Margret Roberts' analysis of multiple data sources to answer the question: 'Are sexually assaulted children receiving justice in NSW?'

The 10th Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect conference organisers have arranged for these and many more conference presentations to be available for download at www.nzfvc.org.nz/accan/papers-presentations

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