

INTEGRATED THERAPY SERVICE ADELAIDE PROGRESS REPORT

Since Act for Kids established in Adelaide in June 2014, we have been working with children and adolescents, their families, schools and other professionals.

To date, the kids we have seen range from 2 to 17 years old, and most have experienced more than one form of abuse or neglect. The majority have experienced emotional abuse and more than half have been exposed to domestic violence. Nearly half have experienced inadequate care by their parents (neglect) and a quarter of the children and adolescents have been physically abused. We have had a few referrals for young people who have experienced confirmed sexual abuse, but there are concerns about the possibility of this for a number of other kids we are treating.



The impact of abuse and neglect

While we have a few referrals for preschool children, the majority of kids we see are primary school aged, and mainly boys. This is often an age and stage when learning and behavioural difficulties make the impact of trauma more noticeable in other environments, such as schools, leading to referral for help.

All children referred have shown signs of emotional, social and/or behavioural difficulties and many also have had developmental and learning difficulties. These children have all experienced abuse or neglect, which has impacted their day to day wellbeing and ability to just get on with being kids.

How we help

Our team includes multidisciplinary therapists skilled at using an integrated approach to support the emotional and developmental needs of children and young people.

We work with children to address their social, emotional, speech, language, problem solving and motor-functioning needs, and their general development.

Our Integrated Therapy Service is designed for children and young people aged 0–17 years, and their carers/family, to help them overcome their experiences and challenges.

This service is available to children in Adelaide and surrounding areas whose families/carers want support from our specialist therapy team.

Referrals can be submitted by a community support agency or self-referral representing the child, young person and or family/carer.

In 2015 we delivered Act for Kids' protective behaviours program for Reception students, Learn to be safe with Emmy and friends, to 11 classes in five different schools – more than 200 children.

We have bookings for another four schools for 2016, and enquiries and tentative bookings for Term 2.



LEARN TO
BESAFE
with Emmy & friends



Case study - Carter* 11 years old

When Carter lived with his mum his life was full of violence. He was physically abused, witnessed domestic violence, and began showing aggressive behaviours himself. Carter's mum decided one day she'd had enough and sent him to live with his dad, who he barely knew.

Dad struggled to cope. Carter was diagnosed with attentional difficulties some years ago and is on a range of medications to help him focus during the day and sleep at night. When Carter didn't do as he was told, his father would punish him harshly. The emotional abuse got so bad Carter's worried teachers notified Government services, who contacted Act for Kids.

Initially dismissive and angry when we first made contact, Carter's dad became more open to our involvement, and eventually keen to discuss how he could support Carter without constantly blaming him.

Our psychologist helped Carter and his dad understand and develop their strengths and work together through their challenges. The psychologist reflected Carter's admiration of his father, back to his dad who had previously felt rejected, thinking Carter did not like him. They are showing signs of a more positive connection.

As he becomes more comfortable, Carter is sharing more experiences of abuse he suffered while in the care of his mother and her partner.

*names changed to protect privacy

Case study - Jamie* 4 years old

Jamie was removed from his mother's care as an infant due to his mother's drug and alcohol abuse and demonstrated failure to care for him. Jamie has been with one foster family for the past two years. Before that, he was in residential care, with rotating professional workers. There were some concerns about the behaviour of some of his carers towards the children in their care.

Jamie was referred to Act for Kids following concerns about his speech and language skills, and his tendency to become distressed or have "meltdowns".

Jamie sucked his thumb for comfort and regulation, and became very distressed when he was told to stop. In an early life marked with fear and inconsistency, his thumb sucking was the only consistent source of comfort. Unfortunately, sucking his thumb was impacting on his speech development. His ability to make himself understood was poor and he was easily frustrated in interactions. Jamie had trouble playing with other children and could not establish or maintain friendships at kindergarten or have long interactions with his siblings in foster care.

At home, Jamie was demanding of his foster mother's attention and company, and he was easily upset, leading to meltdowns from which he could not be consoled.

Our speech pathologist and psychologist worked together with Jamie and his foster mother in sessions. Speech and language therapy has enabled Jamie's speech to become clearer and through better communication his family relationships have improved. Both therapists demonstrate supportive and reflective ways of playing and communicating together, to replace previous interactions which had focused upon distracting Jamie from any distress, or removing him to "calm down" by himself.

Jamie's mother now has a greater understanding of the impact of previous trauma and neglect upon Jamie, and his current needs for comfort and relationship building. This has involved addressing Jamie's use of thumb sucking, in a way that is not too distressing and ensuring Jamie has other ways to regulate himself.



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