

Little Children Big Outcomes Project

Development of a creative therapeutic program for children 0 – 4 years old impacted by family violence

WRISC Family Violence Support: WRISC is a Non Government Organisation and registered charity that provides safety, support, information, advocacy, children's counselling, court support, and case management to women and children impacted by family violence. We have provided services across the Central Highlands region of Victoria for 30 years, and our service is free and confidential.

Van Go Program: The Van Go program provides a mobile therapy bus based in Moorabool Shire assisting children and young people from birth to 18 years recover from family violence. The Van Go Therapy bus is staffed by therapists and travels to schools and other locations to offer tailored therapeutic support including art, music and play therapy to infants, children and young people. Following the cessation of a successful pilot project (see impact report) funding was severely reduced and staffing levels have dropped from 6.8 to 2.6 positions to provide services to an extended geographic region.

The challenge: A severe reduction of staffing has meant the loss of a play therapist as well as an ability to meet the demands of the expanded Geographic region. The program has re-opened its doors and in two weeks has almost reached capacity. The capacity to develop programs is severely reduced.

As part of the original pilot program, the mobile therapy has been most suitable for Primary School children but is less effective with the younger pre-school age group due to their developmental stage. Current research suggests that interventions to reverse the impacts of trauma are most effective during significant brain development periods in the 0-4 year age range and when the attachment relationship is strengthened which is often directly disrupted due to the family violence.

The solution: The development of an integrated and localized 0-4 year old program that would provide support for up to 50 children and caregivers who are recovering from family violence in Moorabool and Ballarat Shires. This project would develop an evidence based program utilizing creativity through art and play to maximize therapeutic outcomes for infants and young children. The funding requested would produce a report that included:

Literature review: Investigating the evidence base of existing 0-4 programs for families recovering from family violence. Australian programs include Peekaboo, the Garden, Theraplay and Play connect.

Devise an integrated program that includes individual, dyadic and group therapy options for carers and their children to minimize harm from family violence. Recommend the best program fit for the unique demographics and challenges within Moorabool and Ballarat LGA's.

Recommend staffing and resources required to run a successful 0-4 program

Investigate potential partners to run this program including other therapeutic programs, maternal and child health and governments

Devise an evaluation strategy for the project to measure impacts and outcomes

Seek ongoing funding from philanthropic Trusts – particularly Helen MacPherson Smith Alliance

Helen McPherson Smith Alliance have a number of grants that could then fund the establishment of the program in 2021 after satisfactory completion of the research and recommendations.