

Tasmania's Participation in the KidsMatter Early Childhood Pilot Project

Penny Andersen, State Facilitator

Infant Mental Health Conference Hobart,
Tasmania November, 2011

Who participated?

- 110 sites across the country representing a cross section of early childhood services.
- 10 sites in the south, north and north-west of Tasmania which included:
 - 4 long-day care centres
 - 2 early learning centres within schools
 - 4 kindergartens within schools

Why did they apply?

- Awareness of increasing professional and community interest in mental health
- Interest in the social and emotional well-being of children in their care
- Concerns about how to best assist children with mental health difficulties, and their families
- Desire for more knowledge about what to do to support children with challenging behaviour

What did they receive?

- Two-day national workshop in Melbourne
- Four three-hour professional learning workshops, plus before- and after- visits to support action planning
- Ongoing contact with the facilitator and regular national and state newsletters
- Support documents for the four components and online access to other resources
- Some funding for additional resources
- Practical strategies and tools to assist practice

What were some of their gains?

- Increased awareness and understanding of mental health in early childhood
- The use of an evidence-based framework to guide their practice
- Confidence in identifying strengths and challenges in existing practice, and increased ability to explain why they do what they do
- Knowledge about when and how to make referrals
- Validation of the importance of their role

What were some things they learnt?

- All elements of the framework are interdependent
- Thorough knowledge about social and emotional development is essential in making the most of every opportunity to help children learn
- Understanding attachment, identity and self-regulation in early childhood is very important
- Understanding a child's thoughts and emotions helps to understand their behaviour
- Small changes can make a difference

What did they do?

- Surveyed parents and staff
- Reviewed current practice
- Set goals
- Identified strategies
- Implemented action plans
- Reflected on results
- Participated in national evaluation

Component 1

Creating a Sense of Community

- Positive Relationships
- Belonging and Connectedness
 - Inclusion
 - Collaboration

Component 2

Developing children's social and emotional skills

- Relationships between children and staff
- Children's social and emotional skill development opportunities
- Staff development and support



Component 3

Working with parents and carers

- Collaborative partnerships with families
 - Connecting families
 - Supporting parenting

Component 4

Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties

- Understanding children's mental health and wellbeing
 - Responding to children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties

What were some examples?

- Increased involvement with fathers
- Participation by parents in planning and review
- Two -way communication diaries for all parents
- Pamphlet for parents about support services
- Helping children to understand and use the language of emotions
- Setting up meet and greet areas to encourage parent interaction with staff and time for parents to interact with children

What were some more examples?

- Home visiting all families
- Tuning in more carefully to the needs, interests and engagement of children
- Giving children positive, growth-promoting feedback
- Identifying and acknowledging strengths in parents, children and colleagues
- Improving communication skills
- Using the BETLS tool to document concerns about individual children

What were the challenges?

- Tasmanian differences in the organisation of early childhood services
- Different needs of long-day care services compared with kindergartens in schools
- Organising time for all staff to participate in professional learning and action planning
- Evaluation processes and competing demands
- Staff turnover in some centres
- Desire by some staff for a 'quick fix' approach
- Building in sustainability

What were some of the strengths?

- Evidence-based framework and resources
- Information about risk and protective factors
- Strengths-based approach
- Involvement of all early years staff
- National project involving all states and territories
- Useful tools for documenting concerns, responding to parents and developing communication skills

What did practitioners say?

- “Everyone is thinking much more about the emotional and social wellbeing of children and families and there is much more positive discussion.”
- “The children are much calmer and staff are consistently looking for positive ways to give feedback to them.”
- “Staff now have more of a common language to talk about children’s and adult’s social and emotional wellbeing
- “Parents are impressed with the way in which children are able to talk about their feelings.”

Where to Next ? - Possibilities

- Move from pilot to more extended implementation
- Further develop resources
- Capture stories of successful practice
- Build on the links between KMEC, the Early Years Learning Framework and NQF
- Increase links with KidsMatter Primary and MindMatters to build continuity and coherence in support for the mental health of children and young people

What was the significance for me?

- Increased understanding of mental health
- Re-affirmation of the significance of the early years in making positive changes
- Recognition of the work of practitioners and the challenges they face
- Privilege and pleasure in visiting centres and working with staff
- Participation in a national project which has the capacity to improve the lives of children and their families

From a recent Tas newsletter.....

“As you validate each child’s essential goodness over and over during daily interactions, tuning in to their unique needs, you give the children in your care the priceless gift of secure attachment. This gift translates into more child courage, more competence, more friendliness, and the ability to rebound from life’s troubles and empathise and cooperate with peers and adults – qualities every child care provider is eager for children to achieve.”

Alice Hoenig 2002

Thank you



Any questions?