

Therapeutic practice with infants in the child protection system

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The Victorian Child Protection Service is specifically targeted to those children at risk of harm or where families are unable or unwilling to protect them. Southern Melbourne Child Protection has one of the largest cohorts of infants and unborn reports in the state. Take Two is a therapeutic service for children and works specifically with Child Protection clients. Treatment approaches focus on the repair of harmful trauma outcomes and improvements in emotional health, relationships and development.

Despite there being a substantial number of Victorian Child Protection clients under two years of age, infants have been an underrepresented group within the Take Two service. In 2013 an infant clinic model was developed and rolled out in several regions as a specific strategy to create a clinical pathway specific to the developmental and relational needs of infants. Further key objectives of the clinic development included identifying and addressing current barriers to accessing therapeutic services for infants and increasing the presence of infants in the minds of child protection workers.

In 2018 a Child Protection Practice Leader with Southern Melbourne, as a requirement of completing a Master of Social Work, approached Take Two with a request to undertake a placement specifically focussing on infant mental health. A theoretical and practical placement program based on learning goals was developed collaboratively.

Since returning to her Practice Leader role the student has implemented a range of practice changes with her teams. These include direct infant observations, increased child development knowledge, modelling and implementing therapeutic approaches within care teams and changing case note and report writing practices. A more formal review of this placement experience and the impact on practice with infant clients within the child protection service would be useful and has the potential to creatively contribute to improved service delivery for infants.