

Multi Agency Collaboration Supporting at Risk Infants and Caregivers - South Australian Child Protection Reform

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Caregiver sensitivity and warmth are crucial for an infant's life-long mental and social health. It is well known that maternal stress introduces risks that can impede the quality of care giving and parenting. Exploration of strategies to build and strengthen parent capacity and care giver sensitivity among a population of parents who themselves have usually received very little positive parenting is a central theme of this presentation. Evidence shows that families with complex issues require an integrated service approach, which is only achieved when partnerships with the family and between services, are prioritised and resourced.

In this paper, we examine the strengths and challenges of multi-agency collaboration, designed to prevent and reduce infant abuse and neglect as well as decrease the number of infants entering state care at birth. We describe Relationships Australia SA pilot Western Child Family Assessment and Referral Service (WCFARNS). The four CFARN programs are funded as part of the SA Government's child protection reform.

DCP and birthing hospitals refer mothers into CFARN when they identify vulnerable and complex issues for an infant and mother. WCFARN also have a direct community referral pathway for Aboriginal families, which allows families to link pregnant women who are not in contact with health services with a WCFARN worker.

The Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS), in particular their universal post-natal home visiting service and allied health teams are crucial partners with DCP and RASA in the development of an effective integrated response. CFARNS also work with Local Partnership Groups involving key Government and NGO's stakeholders, who jointly devise coherent service pathways and collaboration.

This presentation will describe the challenges of multiagency work, resources required for joint care planning and family-led practices, information sharing protocols, and the innovations and problem solving required to improve vulnerable infant and children's mental health outcomes.