

My Kids and Me: Building Capacity in the Parents of At Risk Children

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- * CatholicCare Sydney’s Placement, Preservation & Restoration Team
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- * One Print Solutions

Background

- * Contracted in 2006 by DoCS to develop a parenting program when there is potential for restoration
- * Re-contracted in 2008
- * 2009 Major program re-write from a behavioural model to a psycho-educational, relationally-based 7 week course, open to all parents irrespective of restoration
- * 2012/13 Evaluation by Australian Centre for Child Protection
- * 2013/14 First external facilitators trained
- * 2014 Design and publication

Background

- * Parents whose children have been removed report not doing well in traditional parenting courses
- * No services are available for these parents unless restoration is actively being pursued
- * Basic social skills are missing
- * Complex histories of trauma, abuse and domestic violence
- * Histories of being dismissed, misunderstood and judged by 'helping' professionals
- * Parents with multiple children removed
- * Almost all think that restoration is on the agenda

Key Aspects

- * Uses metaphor as a process for therapeutic change
- * Non-judgemental and welcoming
- * Parents with similar stories learn and grow together
- * Celebration of small changes which are actually giant leaps
- * Skilled, trained facilitators ‘hold’ the emotional dynamics in the room

MY KIDS AND ME OUTPUT LOGIC

OUTSIDE OF SCOPE

Outcomes for children are improved

ASSUMED OUTCOMES

Increase in parent preparedness and capacity to engage in other skill-based parenting programs

Improved relationships between parent/s and children, parent/s and children's carers, and parent/s and case workers

COURSE OUTPUTS

Group participants learn how to communicate appropriately and assertively with professionals and carers

Group participants learn how to communicate and relate appropriately to children during access visits

Group participants understand the difference between aggressive, passive and assertive communication

Group participants understand what it's like for children who are in out of home care

Group participants improve understanding of their self worth and strengths

Group participants are able to identify and manage strong emotions and understand the process of grief and loss

Facilitators are non-judgemental, accepting of difference, supporting, respectful and empathise with participants

Parent attends the seven sessions of the *My Kids and Me* course. Each session has a specified aim

Parent accepted into the course and agrees to abide by the rules of the course

Parent attends a pre-group interview where basic eligibility/ needs are considered

Parent is referred to the *My Kids and Me* course by either the NSW Department of Community Services or self-referral



INPUTS

Evaluation

We assessed whether there were any discernible changes in parents'

- * confidence
- * knowledge
- * behaviour
- * attitudes

following their participation in My Kids and Me

Data Sources

- * A variety of data was collected from parents both before and after participation in My Kids and Me
- * Facilitators provided their views during a focus group
- * Administrative and clinical data was reviewed

Participants

- * 38 participants
- * 7 courses – 4 in Sydney, 3 in Wollongong
- * Mostly female participants with one or more children in OOHC
- * Main reasons for referral were:
 - * Adult substance abuse
 - * Domestic violence
 - * Mental health concerns

Reasons for Participating

- * improve parenting
- * understand their children's feelings
- * manage their children better
- * improve themselves
- * get their children back



Want to learn as much as I can to be a better parent because I've never had any parenting - in and out of foster care so raised myself and have picked things up along the way.

Why participate?

- * Better understanding of what has happened and hopefully learn something that I can use in the future.*
- * Support, education and development.*
- * To better myself for my daughter so I can be a better parent.*

What do you want from My Kids and Me?

- * Learn new techniques.*
- * Support, direction and the skills to be a good parent.*
- * A good understanding of the situation I'm in. Hope for the future.*

What was most helpful?

- * Realising how important we are to our children whether they are coming home or not*
- * Legal advice, finding out more about myself*
- * Getting a better understanding of what I need to change about me so that so that I can be more assertive and empowering for those around me especially for my kids*

Parents said

- * *It helped knowing that people cared.*
- * *It wasn't confusing and the people were nice*
- * *They felt comfortable in a supportive environment which was not pressured but calm.*
- * *They don't judge but treat everyone equally.
Instructors were wonderful*
- * *Be confident as your children are still there and there's always a chance they will come back*

Parents said

- * I don't start with a negative view now, am more open*
- * Things happened which you can't undo so make a new start*
- * No matter what, you are their mum*



I am different since completing MKM. My child returned and I am being straight, dealing with my own feelings, I was taught to be kind to myself. Learnt about paths so my decisions are clearer; I can choose to change direction and know what's going to happen.



I have learnt to take time to reflect and appreciate all the good/positive goals you have achieved during the time your baby's been in care, also I've learnt more communication skills, how to deal with sad emotions before turning angry and erupting and also emotions, especially with young kids/babies

Facilitators' Reflections

- * Acceptance
- * Feel valued
- * Not alone
- * Take on more responsibility
- * Openness
- * Sense of safety

Moments of Change

- * Facilitators are all trained in the program
- * Have an understanding of the COS' notion of “Being with” and keeping their hands on the circle
- * Allow the metaphors to:
 - * Create a shared language
 - * Provide space for reflection, challenge and change
 - * Speak deeply into the hearts

Lessons Learnt

- * Group work with brave facilitators and brave participants can be transformative
- * Understanding that parents have been damaged creates an opportunity to care
- * Metaphors allow unspeakably painful experiences to be given a language thus opening up the possibility of healing
- * If we do not work with parents whose children have been removed, the cycle of abuse, neglect and removal will continue

Discussion

- * How can you and your service work creatively to offer a service to parents whose children have been removed?
- * What thoughts, fears and systems might get in the way?



*‘Every person you will ever meet has infinite worth
(regardless of our body, mind or talents). We each
matter and we matter absolutely’.*

*Frank Kimber and Kent Hoffman
(Circle of Security)*